

ANDRÉ LHOTE : TREATISE ON LANDSCAPE PAINTING



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ANDRÉ LHOTE : Treatise on Landscape Painting

Translated by W.J. Strachan

A. ZWEMMER . LONDON

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Foreword to the English Edition

Before Mr W. J. Strachan came to see me, his name was known to me. French poets are proud to have had '*cet autre compagnon des Muses*' for their translator.

I welcomed, therefore, the offer that he made of translating this difficult work, and I am grateful to him to-day for having brought so thankless a task to completion.*

I am well aware that a treatise on painting, even if its author wished to escape the sin of pedantry, runs the risk of seeming tedious. Mr Strachan has contrived to reduce this risk to the minimum. If, therefore, the student or enquirer has the courage to pursue his reading to the end, to consider (as did a much too indulgent critic) this excursion into the land of painting as a pleasure trip, this is not a little due to the translator.

May this book win the favour of the English-speaking public as it has already won that of the Latin! I shall then feel encouraged to complete the writing of the *Treatise on the Figure* which is the logical sequel.

ANDRÉ LHOTE April 1949

* Translator's Note

In my turn I should like to acknowledge my indebtedness to T. D. D. Divine, of Lincoln's Inn, and Percy Horton, Ruskin Master of Drawing at the University of Oxford, for many helpful suggestions from respectively the lay and the technical point of view, and to record my gratitude. w.j.s

Preface

In writing this book I had in mind solely the education of that limited and sympathetic public who regularly go round the galleries and exhibitions and whom I hear questioning one another, quite pathetically sometimes, about the merits of this or that picture to which the critics have drawn attention but the qualities of which escape them. I had an idea that by unveiling the mysteries of pictorial technique I should be helping them to a clearer vision. I also hoped, I must confess, by showing what a complicated business it is, to deter some amateurs of the practice of painting, and transform a good many daubers into appraisers pure and simple.

I reckoned without that faculty for self-deception which mysteriously descends on a man the moment he holds a brush in his hand. Whatever be the result of his work, he has confidence in himself, and if by a miracle he declares it a failure he hopes, thanks to some sort of heavenly mediation, to do better next time.

My defeat was to be even greater: mere connoisseurs just because they 'understood' how a picture was made, imagined all they had to do now, recollecting Raphael's dictum 'to understand is to equal', was to put time-honoured methods into practice and they would produce viable works of art. They imagined themselves back in the period when it was sufficient for the artist to inherit a technique for him to equal and sometimes surpass his master, as indeed Raphael did.

I have re-read my work with the idea of discovering the reasons for this defeat, and I have noted that I did not sufficiently stress the indisputable fact that painting is nothing nowadays unless one possesses the rare gift of *feeling*. To Cézanne his whole genius, as he saw it, consisted in his '*petite sensation*', that is the faculty he had for transfiguring the actual through the faithful notation of his hallucinations from nature. He was not satisfied with conforming to the Ingres-Raphael-Perugino tradition, etc. He had to inaugurate a mode of expression that was the very opposite of this; he declared himself the 'primitive' of this new tradition which requires you to start off by ignoring all previous fact, all previous vision, and surrendering yourself entirely to excitement. For every object, if for a moment you forget all knowledge you have of its shape, its colour and its substance, becomes a source of unexpected images, and the ecstasy of their capture provides the poetic imagination of the spectator with a spring-board of an entirely novel character. This tradition, the tradition of an impressionism extended in the plastic sense and secretly nourished on a nostalgia for Latin classicism, is so deeply rooted in contemporary sensibility, and it corresponds so closely to the spirit of our tormented epoch, that painting from now on – and soon sculpture – unless recourse is had to the dictates of sensation – will be merely adulterated virtuosity and empty rhetoric.

The amateur of painting for whom I am writing must realise that the wheel

has turned since Raphael and even Chardin, and the scientific knowledge of the world that Leonardo da Vinci glorified has lost its stimulating qualities. In those crucial moments when the revelation of the picture to be created occurs (the real moment of 'inspiration'), the everyday world disappears to give place to a world composed solely of appearances and phantoms. But these appearances (a mis-shapen fruit stand, enormous limbs or branches with the light on them not fitting in with their shaded portions) have no virtue unless a sort of internal logic, something comparable to musical sense, links up the fragments in a sustained rhythm. Contact with reality is then effected in the form of a brilliance that gains permanence from an almost mystic fervour.

You can see how this continuous ecstasy (such as Monet, Cézanne and Van Gogh knew) differs from the considered, classical approach, traditional work evolving round an initial idea.

Too many critics every day oppose so-called painters of reality to the school of new painters who are more or less happy successors of Cézanne, not suspecting that in so doing they are relegating their peculiar heroes to an outmoded past. They do not improve their case by talking about academicism where painters of sensation are concerned, which is reversing the logic of the words since it is precisely the academic artist (the only one to whom the public spontaneously awards the palm) who sees as men before him have seen and therefore paints as men have painted before him; he belongs to a bygone age. The Academicians have eyes only for the past and are blind to the present. As generals, they lose battles; as artists, they mummify art.

We must, however, concede this point to the defenders of the painters of reality that occasionally some of them, in the innocence of their hearts and their complete ignorance of pictorial conventions, succeed in seeing with the soul of a child, and therefore discern new images in reality; and we must agree, on the other hand, that sometimes painters of sensation get side-tracked and instead of new images give us a copy of those they discovered one day when they were really visionaries. This proves how difficult it is to avoid the mechanisation of the pictorial gesture and the automatism which is born of experience, the new enemy.

The old masters could repeat their forms because they varied their subjects (a naval battle succeeding a nativity). To-day, as we have seen, the subject is neither more nor less than the confrontation of the painter with the model, the problem being to delve under the accumulation of habit for the face of the present time. Repetition in such a case is a serious fault. The problem, if you are really sincere, is not only not to repeat an old master, even were he the most illustrious, but not to repeat yourself, to be born a virgin each morning.

Obviously this new method involves great discipline, and it is here where the Latin artist hears the voice of classicism again. A discipline both intoxicating and cruel, since it is not only a matter of setting about forgetting the material

world, the object in itself (or, if you prefer, outworn points of view) in favour of an illusion that is as quick to vanish as it is to appear, but also of forgetting your own point of view so painfully acquired.

By means of this double self-scrutiny, the painter tears himself to pieces, and his most spontaneous effusion in the very centre of appearances is never free from a sort of twinge of pain on account of this continual rejection of inherited tradition and his own. Recently a painter, not of reality but of materiality, has rebelled against what he called 'the tyranny of André Lhote'. This tyranny is criticised for being exercised at the expense of the introduction into the work painted of the whole personality of the painter who is painting the picture. Is it possible to imagine the *presence* of the artist, this critic demands, unless the artist in question has the courage to be absolutely himself in front of the easel? I'd like to know if there is a better way of arriving at the plenitude, the maximum of receptivity, than by forgetting as you make contact with phantasmagoric reality both what others were before you and what you are yourself.

André Gide once used to express the wish that young talents should be discouraged so as to allow only deep-rooted vocations to expand through the necessary discipline. I think I have satisfied this reasonable demand by emphasising difficulties that hitherto I have only hinted at. The apprentice painter must learn that the more he tries to be himself the further will he leave behind the sympathy of the public and the critics, for the public which is for ever talking about the personality of the artist, at heart only cares for the formulae that it has already the key to. It has its crazes; yesterday it swore only by the exactness of the drawing, the clearness of the modelling (so lovely when the modelling has the maximum roundness), respect for local colour, etc. To-day what delights him is the freedom of composition, the appearance of improvisation. Now, contrary to what you might expect, the registering of sensations, though it produces spontaneity in preliminary works, drawings or sketches, results, when it is a question of amplifying these notations to put them on the scale of the monumental picture, in awkward or dull passages, and corrections in which the internal struggle that I have clumsily tried to depict can be recognised. The more one speaks of humanising art, the blinder one is before these authentic traces of the most human of the dramas of art. There is nothing to be done about it: everything that authenticates genius such as is manifested in the works of Cézanne, Van Gogh and Seurat, princes of direct sensation, will be antipathetic to the majority of people, and the general rule is to die, like these 'three great men', completely misunderstood. This will, I hope, be enough to dissuade not a few young people from the idea that painting is a relaxation or a means of earning a livelihood.

ANDRÉ LHOTE 1946

Preface to the First French Edition

The astounding interest that France has lately shown in the case of Van Gogh, the interminable commentaries produced by his life, his letters, his paintings, his drawings, have drawn to the notice of the general public what an extraordinary individual this landscape painter is, who stands, as he does, half-way between a tramp and a ruminant, this motionless maniac stuck at the cross-roads like a Boundary god, indifferent to sun, rain, cold, even the absence of light! The hat with candles stuck in its brim worn by the painter of starry nights or street lamps has become a kind of halo which adds lustre, if I may venture to say so, to a whole generation of budding saints.

This curiosity sustained by numerous books on the painter with the severed ear has coincided with an amazing crop of landscape painters. Increasing facilities for long journeys, growing dislike of urban life, wider opportunities for leisure, all promote the revival of this old French vice of painting. . .

Hosts of easels cover the woods and countryside, sunshades sprout in every field, the mistral or the tramontane blow to no effect, the easels stand firm, fastened with ropes, fixed to the ground by the weight of a rubble-filled sack, and neither dust in their eyes nor the cruel glare of the light deters thousands of French people from their touching task of dabbing a brush on a piece of canvas set there as a snare for pictures.

Confronted with so much heroism, one might be tempted to applaud if the exhibitions of postal workers, doctors, lawyers, railwaymen, chemists, etc, did not furnish annually the most authentic subjects of desolation. You might imagine indeed that so much fervour and love for houses, mountains and trees might give us innumerable little pictures which, through the carefulness applied to the precise drawing of the objects, the neatness of execution, careful exactness, ignorance of studio tricks, might attain a sort of childlike candour. You might even hope to discover there, produced by the innocent eye, unusual proportions, unexpected relations of colour and form, in short, all the moving discoveries of pure instinct, the poetic discoveries of ingenuousness. Alas, nothing of the kind; almost all the canvases, covered with commonplace tones, feeble and approximate forms, reflect, but without any offsetting talent, the flippancy associated with the works of professional painters, the majority of whom, when they abandon life for landscape, seem suddenly to lose the taste for design and the sense of scale.

It is right that we should ask ourselves the reason for such neglect, for after all painting is *one*, and it seems that the picture ought, independently of the subject treated, to tend towards a perfect realisation.

There is no doubt that the notion of immediate pleasure, gathered from the very heart of physical release, you get from the presence of a lake, a wood or a meadow, or even the sporting one which may arise from the struggle against

the turbulence of the elements, appears irreconcilable with self-control.

Participation in a moving sight does not perhaps allow you to place yourself 'above your work in full clarity of spirit'. It may, furthermore, be objected that if a certain disorder of execution is inherent in the fixing of a perishable scene, or a scene in which the changes are rapid and manifold, the sketch taken to the studio may give place to a construction seen again and consolidated by the mind, a construction which, done over again from nature, may become a study and a new start for an important composition. There would be nothing in that beyond the capacity of a somewhat ambitious artist.

The surprising thing is that this necessity should appear of so little urgency, not to the dilettanti alluded to above, but to the technicians themselves, whose bad manners tend to be imitated by the former. I think I see the reason for this idleness, this impious effrontery in the fact that, if the galleries are chock full of historical compositions, Marriage Feasts at Cana, Crownings of Napoleon, of overwhelming complexity, apt to discourage the technician himself and make him humble and circumspect as the result of an inevitable inferiority complex, these very galleries contain only a considerably limited number of great landscape compositions. The amateur painter, should he dream of an important work, will never dare to attack a subject in which the human figure is present; it is obviously necessary to know too many things before undertaking to represent a vast collective action. If he would evoke a historic or everyday subject, immediately the formidable ghosts of Veronese, Titian, Tintoretto, David, Delacroix, and a hundred other giants, rise up to bar his way; their masterpieces spread abroad in reproductions, keep him in a salutary state of respect and awe. If on the other hand he thinks of a natural scene, he feels suddenly relieved of his scruples. He certainly has some recollections of Claude Lorrain's twilight compositions, a more confused idea of the works of Poussin, so dark, so remote, so despised by the populariser, but above all he knows Corot. If he is incapable of appreciating the technical subtleties, the power of transposition so shyly veiled, he very much appreciates the simplicity of the subjects, and, deceived by the apparent modesty of the painter, he fails to realise that landscape involves a mass of knowledge as extensive as the painting of historical subjects and certainly more invention, more devices for getting round snags of certain disturbing elements (light, atmosphere, recession), which I intend to treat of here and the expression of which constitutes the best part of the art of landscape painting.

Is the professional painter much more ambitious than the amateur? Apart from ten artists who realise how much previous knowledge and meditation are implicit in the works of Cézanne, Renoir and Seurat, and that, despite the apparent slovenliness of the impressionist touch, a landscape is not made with dabs of the brush but with calculations and stylised forms, the majority of the rest, deceived by the very fidelity of impressionist representation, so lovingly faithful to the actual, and by the virtuosity of the craft, see in the act of the

landscape painter only abandonment to pure sensation, physical indulgence, a vacation pastime; the vacation, in short, of the mind!

It is only quite recently, thanks to the Exhibition of Flemish painting and the publication of some books on Breughel, that the curiosity of painters has veered towards the art of the composed landscape. The wonderful paintings of the *Seasons* by Breughel are beginning to be popular; Patinir, that magnificent landscape painter, is gradually emerging from the shadows. But this is not enough; an intelligent publisher should publish a collection – to which no commentary would be needed – wherein would figure not only the two extraordinary landscapes of Toledo by El Greco, all those Rubens filled with cosmic breath, a judicious selection from the historic landscapes of Poussin and Claude, but, above all, a series of landscapes borrowed from more or less well-known compositions of old masters, of which we have been able to include in this book only an inadequate representation.

The astonishing fact would then be seen that landscape, dominated and arranged in accordance with certain needs of the mind, required the efforts of the greatest artists and that the notation of the external scene which at present is the delight of lovers of trees and rivers, has never been more than a preliminary study, a work of analysis preceding the architectural assembling, the synthesis of elements scattered over the four corners of space. From the Primitives to Delacroix, through Giovanni Bellini, Giorgione, Titian, Tintoretto, Cranach, Dürer, etc, the most voluptuous and most poignant compositions which unfold themselves against a background of nature (even if this décor is to be seen only through a window) offer us a model of landscape composition apt to make us reflect on the necessity of dominating our fragmentary impressions so that we may bring about this rich conglomeration of different elements; trees, rocks, meadows, lakes, clouds, flocks, waves, capable of summing up the universe in a more or less revealing lightning flash.

This confinement of the cosmos within a feeble two-dimensional space will be the more effective and eloquent according as the rhythm linking the natural forms is clear and powerful and as certain elements borrowed from the land, sea or sky fit in thanks to the magic of ingenious plastic analogies, while the details particularised to the fullest extent clearly inscribe their specific ornaments on the great initial masses, like a fine obsessive embroidery.

If with the old masters, the landscape, background of a historical scene, ceases to be an inert setting and joins in the universal rhythm to become a microcosm, all the more reason why modern landscape taken as a sole theme, man becoming a detail buried in the profusion of foliage, should aim at passing beyond the stage of illustrative representation, from the notion of unessential details and finally endow exterior phenomena, the magic inventory of which it has undertaken since the impressionist movement, with the highest, the most universal significance. This is precisely what was meant by Cézanne, whose

experiment of genius opened up the world of present research, when he set himself as a supreme aim to 'do Poussin over again from Nature'.

In order to stimulate the efforts of artists desirous of attempting this ambitious synthesis, we have thought it useful to proceed to the recapitulation both of the conquests of modern painting and those of traditional painting to the extent to which the latter are in tune with our feeling. If the reading of da Vinci's *Treatise on Landscape Painting*, most of the articles being out of date, makes us feel very modest because of the universality of the knowledge he displays, it is just this irrelevance to our time of the famous gospel that urges us irresistibly to undertake this twofold study. We make thereby no claim to supply giftedness, since temperament is at the root of artistic creation, but, advised by Cézanne himself who claimed that with a 'little temperament and much knowledge one could go a long way', we consider that the laws that we are about to promulgate will be of some use to beginners in whose eyes the artist's activity should pass beyond that of the landscape painter drowsing by a river bank.

Readers may be surprised not to find famous works of old masters or contemporary painters in this collection of examples. We did not think it worth while to include pictures too well known and reproduced everywhere more or less (a post-card is so adequate for the purpose). On the contrary, we have thought it necessary to show landscapes chosen from compositions not yet dulled through over-familiarity.

As far as the moderns are concerned the emphasis has been less on the success than on the orientation of the painter, since the point is to exalt not the talent which speaks for itself but the use the artist claims to make of it.

All the landscapes are strongly intellectualised and ambitiously conceived while at the same time being profoundly 'experienced'. This is as it should be. I hope I shall not be alone in this opinion. There comes a moment when, overwhelmed with works too rapidly executed and not sufficiently matured, the public is less interested in ability than in the desire to do better. It is to this difficult and vigilant public that this book is addressed and at the same time to those young artists who have so kindly insisted that I should publish my Summer Course in co-ordinated form.

ANDRÉ LHOTE Paris 1939

The Decline of the Composed Landscape

Some of the landscapes which illustrate this book are taken from backgrounds of pictures by painters of the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries. These painters are not regarded as pure landscape painters. Their knowledge was, however, so complete, and so deep their understanding of the universe that these backgrounds, apparently sacrificed to the main subject – the action of heroes and martyrs – constitute real pictures. They form a perfect whole, and the majority of these details are so complete and vast that by their organisation, their poetry, their truth, they literally crush the most ambitious constructions of modern painters (18th and 19th centuries included) who have made landscape, so to speak, their speciality.

It seems that since the North-European painters whose last representatives among the landscape painters are Breughel and Patinir, pictorial art has shrunk more and more, and as the pictorial processes gained in suppleness and freedom, the vision of the universe grew dimmer, as if it really were an inexorable law that happiness and facility are always accompanied by some sort of decline.

It is most significant, from this point of view, to observe the part played in those shimmering compositions by fragments which taken in isolation would be revealed as prodigious compositions in their own right. If all this work were put into them, it was probably not for a bet or through excess of humility. There was a public with a capacity for lingering over them, and whose interest was not confined to the main details. The multiplicity of these *motifs* shows not only the artists' wealth of imagination but also the power of concentration of the spectator whose attention was capable of returning indefinitely on its tracks and resuming its indefatigable investigation. The epithet 'inexhaustible' could truthfully be applied to a work of art at that time.

Is it not quite a modern vice, this habit of draining a canvas at a single glance as some people gulp down a cocktail, and complaining of unintelligibility and complication whenever a work requires study and patience on the part of the spectator?

The amount of talk about the decadence of art has made it necessary to say something about the decadence of the public.

The first examples of landscape composition in France go back to Poussin and Claude Lorrain. Possibly these masters, in their best canvases, attain the greatness of Breughel and Patinir from the point of view of composition, but it must be admitted that their colour, which was probably not as beautiful as that of their predecessors, has been considerably less well preserved. Many Poussins have lost their freshness and most of the Claudes are almost irreparably ruined as a result of underpainting which has pushed through their delicate 'ground' and erstwhile brilliant surface pigment. As for Corot, Renoir, Seurat, Cézanne, who modelled themselves on Poussin, their universe appears still further reduced: it

mountains ever appeared the finest background subject; a picture without those rocky protuberances, grey and pink indentations, contrasting the most diametrically opposed plastic element with the rounded forms of the trees, was inconceivable to them. Their nostalgia is fed on visions of the Alps crossed on their return from Italy, and the construction of a landscape (besides being the traditional escape) is for them a magnificent traveller's tale.

It is by comparing these majestic organisations, these worlds in little, with the finest modern landscapes governed by the easy unity of the 'view-point', that we can measure our decline. It seems that, having all our leisure for moving from place to place, admiring the plain after the forest, the sea after the mountain, we consider as superfluous any effort to recapitulate these wonders on canvas. We tend to illustrate merely our momentary pleasure rather than to build up our conception of the world.

Two Great Families of Landscape Painters

If you compare the *Peasants' Wedding*, the *Harvest*, or the *Haymaking* of Breughel, or Rembrandt's *Bridge Landscape* (of which adequately approximate colour reproductions are procurable), you see that painters may be divided into two very distinct families: those who express themselves essentially with the help of colour and those for whom the variations from light to dark in a tone set once and for all, are sufficient. On the one hand the rainbow, on the other, earth colours. (But this unsubstantial prism in the hands of first the North-European illuminators, then of Fra Angelico, Baldovinetti, Hieronymus Bosch, Breughel, and the Impressionists, gives wonderful expression to the solidity of the world, brushed by electricity, haloed with reflections. And these muddy browns and blacks progressively lightened to saffron and mimosa, running over the picture in vast sheets of gradated tones, are capable of producing the most celestial mirages.)

First I will consider the manifestations of these opposing families, and later the groups who 'compose', applying these different techniques.

I shall be careful, while so doing, not to have the temerity to state that one technique is better than another. We know in any case that there are neither good nor bad methods, but only a good or bad way of applying them. This truism would be useless, unless it allowed one to conclude that the essential thing is not the assiduous adoption of this or that technique but the application of the one selected to its extreme limit there and then, and the extraction from it of all its potentialities. The adoption of a technique with proper respect and within the framework of an actual scene is well enough, but it is still better to push it to its maximum degree of intensity. It is frenzy alone that turns the craftsman into a poet; it is the predominance given to a technique alone that

gives the spectator the illusion of escaping from technique and attaining the heights. Everything for the craftsman, be he engraver, sculptor or painter, is a technical question; I will go so far as to say, remembering Grünewald, Tintoretto, El Greco and the sculptors Juan de Juni and Berruguete, technical hysteria.

Chiaroscuro

Let us examine Cuyp's *Landscape with Sheep* in the Museum of Amsterdam. You can get cheap colour reproductions of it in the print shops. (cp Plate 25).

Apart from the top of the sky which offers a discreet blue on the left (it is really grey, and only appears blue in contrast to the dominating orange tone), the picture is entirely modelled in golden browns. The green of the trees is a mixture of yellow and black, the indispensable cool tones of the earth are similarly obtained by the introduction of a simple grey. (For the benefit of the layman, we must point out that it is an absolute law that the transition from *warm* shadow to *warm* light is effected with the help of a *cold* tone. Roughly speaking, any form subjected to light can be compared, for those interested in chiaroscuro, to a cylinder, the light part of which, with its dominating orange-yellow, imperceptibly joins the dark part, orange-brown, through tonal gradations, the middle range of which will be cool. Impressionism's great discovery was the replacing of the dark part of the cylinder by a blue which was as bright as the orange of the light part, the transition being effected with the help of violet. But do not let us anticipate.)

In this landscape of Cuyp the only unexpected note from the point of view of colour is the tiny orange-red spot of the middle shepherd's blouse. It forms, as it were, the key of the picture; it hints at the colour chosen for this grey underpainting tinged with blue, the whole interest of the composition being in the *general modelling*. In fact if you follow the forms as they unfold, they can be seen starting from a dark point and arriving at their maximum brightness as they pass progressively through all intermediate values without the painter having had recourse to colour variations. For it is a law that the use of contrasted values involves the rejection of colour contrasts. Eugène Carrière, who was not endowed with sufficient temperament to realise his conceptions in paint, supplied this excellent definition of what a picture is: 'It is the logical development of a light'. To which I will add: this logic implies the orientation on *opposing rhythms* of those unfolding zones of light, *the expression of which will be all the more authoritative as their range is extended*.

The foreground of this model landscape shows us a dark hill on the left surmounted by two horsemen of the same value. The herd of cattle following these horsemen and making their way towards the centre is already much lighter; the last animal is darkened only to give this central glimmer of light its

maximum intensity. It forms the necessary 'screen'; a point we discuss later. The two shepherds, the flock of sheep, disappear into that sheet of light of which they are only a 'modulation', or rather an ornament in the same way as the edges of rock behind them, which terminate the first subject. After the sheep comes the cool part, the normal half-tone leading imperceptibly to the great shadow which at the other side of the picture, *and on the diagonal*, represents with the trees and the castle the crest of this vast terrestrial wave. Thus the whole picture has been logically followed through with a series of gradations, dark - light - dark, these two poles forming the composition.



The rocks in half-tone, light in relation to the horseman of the foreground but dark in relation to the light sky, play against the sky the part played by the cow silhouetted dark against the luminous ground; they make another screen acting as a yard-stick for measuring the space and, by contrast, suggesting depth, the eternal preoccupation of painters and their forbidden fruit. (Since the picture, a development of the primitive fresco and two-dimensional shape, in theory excludes the third dimension.)

Having 'read' the first movement from left to right, we can recommence the analysis from the other direction. It is essential to begin the operation with the bigger contrast; the shadow of the vertical rock, in the middle distance at the centre, surmounting the great sheet of light already considered. This shadow can be seen gradually becoming transparent until it is diluted in the sky, half-way up, between the base and the tree-crowned top. At the base of these rocks, trees are aligned, a second row of screens, pushing back the river, the furthest shore of which will be lost in the distant mountain that gradually darkens towards the left edge of the picture. This analysis of rhythmic waves of darks and lights might be pursued indefinitely. It can be applied to the details as much as to the whole. It can be equally carried out for the *Landscape with Bridge* of Rembrandt as for the *Landscape with the Herd* of Rubens. Examining these masterpieces and comparing them with inferior works, the *Everdingen Landscape* (Louvre No.2365) for example, it will be noticed that the composition is all the more evocative, more beautiful as the dark-light journey is extended and its flashing channels borrow the maximum space available for their recession to vanishing point.

Once again, magic, mystery, all these analytical spells which poets and a certain class of art lovers find distasteful, amazingly timid before their enjoyment (as if the knowledge of how it is contrived should in some way diminish it; as if knowledge of anatomy suppressed the delight of love), all these spells are the result of calculation and not of inspiration. For inspiration is a very poor thing and very soon extinguished when faced with the magnitude of the effort which must be accomplished before you can bring yourself into line with the exigences of the artist's profession.

Colour

Opposed to these painters of chiaroscuro are the colourists, from the Northern illuminators to Van Gogh, that maker of great inspired images (the dimensions and complexity of which are on the limited scale, alas, of his everyday imagination).

In the absence of the Cuyp, let us compare the fine Van Goyen of the *Petit Palais*, colour plate No.51, with the *Bord de Rivière* of Van Gogh's, colour plate No.52, where the spectrum wisely rejected by Rembrandt is offered in all its subtleties. It is useless to search for a pure white or black or even a very strong contrast of values; it is possible to state without exaggeration that the greater part of this admirable work is made up of the multiplication of one and the same value. On the other hand, violet, blue, green, yellow, orange and red of the spectrum can be distinguished in it. This enables us to reinforce the law stated in the chapter on chiaroscuro with this complementary law: *The use of colour-contrasts excludes contrasts of tone values*. This truth seems to shine out when you look at the works, as different from each other as those of Rembrandt and Van Gogh, those two Dutchmen equally mad about light, but it fades away curiously when, ceasing to listen to the counsels of Dame Painting, interpreted by these two messengers, you listen only to the cunning counsels of Dame Nature, full of hidden snares, whose blossoming apple trees have always harboured serpents.

If in this Van Goyen landscape the extreme light and extreme dark are indicated in some parts of the picture, the pictorial drama takes place between these two opposite points: in the realm of the half-tones. In Van Gogh, as in all colourists, an equivalent drama will take place in the tinted greys. The extreme limits of the gamut chosen, red and orange, are similarly shown on some exceptional points, but they are only there as landmarks; they act in some way like an architectural or tonal buttress to the building, but in no way as essential fabric. The 'tonic' keynote is given on certain portions; it serves to determine the scale. Each picture has its own colour scale. A musician would say that modulations into heterogeneous tones are dangerous here, and those with

related tones are the most pictorial. It is right that we should insist on these first truths at the risk of exasperating those who are familiar with them and will have no use for this book.

In the *Bord de Rivière* of Van Gogh, the essential landmarks are therefore the red and the orange, red in a pure state, orange already diminished. The other colours and especially the green and blue have only a virtual existence; *they are born in some way of the contrast produced by this red and this orange* which set their complementary colours flowing round them. The very west of the picture is reduced in this great colourist to appearances of blue and ghosts of green. The yellow and violet, neglected complementaries, appear in the symphony only as exceptional. From now on we may be permitted to lay hold of an all-important law: *the colourist does not use all the prismatic colours in a pure state, one violent colour is enough to animate the composition*. A witness, a boundary, it limits the play of modulation; a cry, it punctuates the interminable susurrations of the pictorial music.

So there is in any work worth the name a dominant before which the other pictorial elements efface themselves. This dominant is sometimes the crowning piece so to speak, the result of a series of colour vibrations; lilacs, mauves and blue-greys can blossom forth into a violet or a pure blue; sulphur yellows and salmon reds lead up to orange. Such a note, if it is more strident than the rest, may in the same way result in dissonance, it may serve, as we have seen, to animate by contrast the broken tones. Here red and orange explode in contrast to the discretion of the, as it were, faded and subtly subdued tones.

Let us emphasise therefore this fact neglected by too many young 'Fauves'. Van Gogh is certainly the most provoking colourist of modern painting. It is in his name that so many canvases are produced in which all the resources of chemistry cancel each other out. This irritation would doubtless be milder if one of the major laws of painting by warm and cool tones were more considered; the spectrum is the reservoir of colours as geometry is that of forms, but it does not follow that all its elements should be employed wholly and *in equal proportions* throughout the picture. To stick to the spectrum, two major colours usually suffice, often a warm and a cool, one more violent than the other. The other colours, diminished as much as possible, will gain liveliness in contrast to the main colours. A 'painter's' tone is, in its isolated form, a dead grey. It is in this sense that the law of complementary colours should be understood and not in the manner of those false colourists who deem it necessary to surround emerald green with a vivid red for heaven knows what fell purpose.

A last observation must be made about Van Gogh whom many critics have reproached for his systematic use of the dots, lines and commas which he used to triturate his coloured impasto. As if a profound logic was not even unconsciously governing the manifestations of the gifted artist! *Writing* his forms, Van Gogh worked at full speed, he did the best he could. And he was in despair that

he could not do better. *Signifying* the form instead of imitating its thickness, he was falling in line with an inexorable law which insists that *colour cannot be modelled*. This allows us to see that a violent colour cannot be subjected to a turning movement or be modelled by the method of progressive saturation. They are bold enough to do it at the *Salon des Artistes Français* and achieve thereby the height of vulgarity. This does not mean that the thickness of objects cannot be expressed with coloured planes, but it will always have to be done by changing the colour at each plane, as we shall see later, a light mauve being a satisfactory substitute for the dark modelling of a greenish yellow object.

Since colour cannot be modelled and since it must be extended flat and count as 'area', the surface must be animated by recourse to a legitimate device. Cézanne, substituting the term 'modulate' for 'model' indicated this device. He animated the 'areas' by taking to a greater degree of subtlety the procedure which Delacroix mentions in his *Journal*, when, quite bowled over by the vibrating green of a Constable meadow, he notes that the intensity of this green is due to the multiplicity of touches of different greens.¹

This modulation is simplified in Van Gogh, if one may say so, on the scale of the painter's nervousity, it harmonises with his passion for drawing: it becomes surface decoration. It is half-way between the Impressionist touch and the calligraphic ornament of the Orientals and the Primitives which is applied to the flat tint and enlivens it by the imitation, exaggerated at will, of the very matter of the object or its decorative covering.

Thus, our first inquiry has shown us the chiaroscuro painters animating surfaces by modelling which, by its changes of tone value, introduces the diversity necessary to the life of the picture, and the colourists renouncing this modelling, which had become a fault, and varying the surfaces by the imitation of the substance of the object or its ornamentation.

If I have lingered perhaps over Van Gogh, it is because there are few more contemporary painters among the immediate masters. His influence asserts itself in Matisse, Bonnard, Picasso, Dufy, etc . . . His frenzy suits our worries and our instability.

His desire for obtaining the maximum effect corresponds to this ever-increasing desire of the public to be bowled over, and at one blow, by the work of art. Unrestricted expression, clearness of handwriting, triumph of the plastic sign, liberty in technique are the means which he reveals to us. It is up to us to make use of them, if we can, for more ambitious ends. The adventure is worth trying. Even if we fail, it is more worth while to waste our time and our talents in such an enterprise than to accumulate whether for selling or hoarding those everlasting more or less enlarged sketches.

¹ Cp. *De Delacroix au Néo-impressionnisme* by Paul Signac (Floury).

Getting Our Bearings

We have made a summary analysis of the opposed methods of pictorial representation, proceeding to some extent from the sculptural landscape, wholly composed of volumes, modelled in monochromatic light, to the musical landscape where nothing is solid, where the turning volume gives way to the fluidities and vibrations of subtle colour. Between these two schools, so far apart from each other, painting by pure value and that based on colour alone, between the technique of values or *tones* and those of colours or *tints*, exist intermediate schools, and they are the most numerous, which make simultaneous sacrifices to both disciplines. This method of procedure seems the most natural, it corresponds to the normal vision of the world, but that only makes it the more dangerous. Before undertaking the analysis of works aiming at this balance, let us mention that they constitute a conclusion rather than a starting point. Playing tricks with opposed techniques is only a fit occupation for masters already trained in copying and transposing from life in one operation.

As this book was written for young artists looking for precise instructions, it is my duty to point out that every beginning in the art of painting (and particularly landscape painting which is such a complex business) should be accomplished under the symbol of purity. At the beginning it is not pictures *but experiments* that should be made; when an experiment succeeds, it is bound to lead to a picture.

This does not mean you can paint as the bird sings – that is to say while thinking of something else – but a work so carried out is necessarily brief, not lending itself to development. The action of the wild snarer of images cannot be renewed indefinitely, it is that of the poacher of painting. And indeed some of them are strangely pretentious, intolerant and dogmatic! Your teacher of the bohemian method is the most dangerous; the modern world is full to saturation with painters of this kind.

I know few disciplined artists who do not tolerate or practise, if necessary, complete abandonment to brute sensation: an angel can play the beast; the reverse process is considered difficult. (Cézanne, slow and obstinate 'constructor', painted some very brilliant spontaneous water-colours.) To wind up on this subject, let us note that there are two sorts of artists: those who paint to make pictures and the more honourable who paint to learn how to paint. Trained from the start to distinguish among his sensations those which lend themselves to modelling and those which call for pictorial music, the painter can put order into his means of expression and correct his mistakes from nature. I am beginning to gain a certain experience of the hesitation of beginners and even of many professionals; very often I see a painting starting spontaneously by values and ending with colour; another, undertaken in a given tonality, ends up in a different key: the painter has changed his mood from one day to the next.

This would not have happened if from his first contact with the model he had made up his mind. Is that so difficult a thing since it is merely a question of knowing in all sincerity whether what appeals to you in the model is the chiaroscuro which gives it solidity or the coloured music which turns it to vapour?

Nature is never the same; how does it come about that all the pictures of too many painters are unreasonably alike? Because of the system they have adopted, their theories? It is precisely because of their lack of theories, of lucidity, the slumber of the imagination which at every contact with the actual should dictate a new use for their resources, a new way of accommodating the laws of art, a new *theory of painting*.

I know an extremely effective remedy for all these indecisions; I never tire of suggesting it to anyone willing to hear. It consists of making, in the gallery or in one's studio, a series of diagrams from a good colour reproduction, ignoring the representational element, that is, the part that does not contribute to the structure of the picture. The first of these diagrams should indicate the governing lines, their orientation and their intervals, the second should have reference to the division of the main lights and darks (the screens) that stand out against the general half-tint for a picture in chiaroscuro; or else to the large areas of colour standing out against the neutral tones for a picture in colour. In both cases it will be quickly observed that even the background of these most turbulent pictures is made up of neutral greys animated by the big contrasts with which they are interwoven.

The last diagram should be concerned with the decoration, and this will appear particularly effective on quiet passages, undisturbed by deep modelling or strong colour. Decoration is a colour in itself. It is an enlivening element which, like all the active elements of the picture, requires to operate alone. Any superimposition of the three above-mentioned elements, modelling, colour, decoration, constitutes a pictorial redundancy.

I should add that in each of the successive diagrams, everything not violently asserted in the work analysed will be left blank. Only by this means will the painter obtain a series of revelations about extremely differentiated operations, the juxtaposed results of which form the structure of the picture.

For a part of his life Cézanne devoted himself nearly every day to training of this sort, making the fine well-known drawings during his visits to the Louvre or from reproductions in his studio. The amazing thing is that out of a hundred beginners it is impossible to find two whose vanity is not wounded by the practice of an equivalent discipline. One knows only of masters who can submit to it passionately. If we were in less of a hurry to reach heaven knows what derisory goal, we should not let a week go by without each one of us devoting himself to these all-important *purification exercises*.

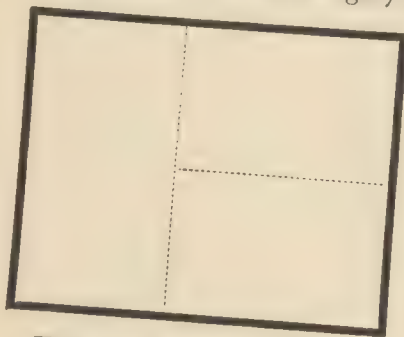
Surface-division

If certain primitive pictures offer us a mosaic of tones imprisoned in pure line where all modelling is absent, other works of Breughel, Hieronymus Bosch or Patinir offer a mixture of the two opposite processes without any loss of unity or distinction.

The *Flight into Egypt* of Patinir (plate 11) provides a perfect example of this play between modelling and flat colour. Comparing it with the Cuyp and Van Goyen landscapes, you notice that the modelling is very reduced and that compared with Van Gogh's, the colour is extremely diluted. Trained as we are to observe that elements put next to each other on a canvas must give mutual concessions, we are not surprised at this restraint. The cottages, meadows, the cornfield of the middle distance are delimited on every side, they are detached from the rest of the picture where the curtain of trees placed in front and forming a screen, merges at various points into the other elements of the landscape.

The coloured areas, brown of the earth, violet of the rocks, green of the trees, blue of the sky, are undisguisedly limited; you no longer find those strident tones, the exalted dissonances in the Van Gogh manner. The modelling is sketchy, the colour is very subdued.

The composition of this picture is curious. Diagrammatically it can be established on a division of the surface into three very distinct areas. The snake-like lines of the rocks in the left-hand vertical compartment enclose the colours, yellow and violet. They would give a strange appearance to the composition if they were not counterbalanced by a series of horizontal lines on which the tree-tops and houses bounding the second, bottom right-hand side compartment, find their place, a compartment reserved for a deep green and including the grey-yellow brightness of the houses.



The upper compartment, enclosing fields, trees, rocks and sky is full of predominantly bluish green tones. Thus the very fragmented coloured mosaic of the illuminators and some Breughel pictures is broadened out at the same time as the chiaroscuro is considerably diminished. The two techniques harmonise in the proportion to which they do not encroach on each other.

The description of this Patinir would be incomplete if I did not add that these three principal compartments are connected not only by the linear continuity of the fields and trees but by elements as it were projected from one area to the next: tonalities, shadows, lights, decorations and what I call plastic rhymes, regular distortions of forms, as for example the contour of the pointed rock outlined against the sky which, projected against the other one at a right angle, gives place to a cloud of the same volume. An equivalent phenomenon may be noticed in the Cuyp landscape. Again it is the silhouette of the illuminated rock of the middle distance which stands out against the sky, and similarly at a right angle.

This very poetic game of analogies is so frequent that modern painters have reduced it to an ingenious system of mechanics. There is a theory of 'displacements' which minds of a scientific turn can study in Albert Gleizes' book, *Painting and its Laws*, and Mr J. W. Powers' *Elements of Pictorial Construction*, on which some day I will have more to say.¹

If you look at Breughel's *Hay-making* (plate 22) you will find the organisation by colour partitions no less evident. The foreground on which the gleaners, elder sisters of Rubens' *Rainbow* peasant girls, are moving about, is orange. The middle-distance is grey-green; then comes a huge screen broken by cottages touched with the necessary amount of orange, then grey-violet rocks, and finally, shut off by a screen of trees, a vast blue strip streaked with a warm light, and comprising the river and the mountains of the distance and the upper part of the sky. The coloured areas here are simply terraced, almost in parallel lines; they take up the whole width of the picture. The complexity of this work is bound up with the wonderful harmony of the *screens* and *passages*, the mechanics of which we shall endeavour to explain.

Screens

Leonardo da Vinci, in his famous *Treatise on Lights and Shadows*, in which the effects of science and poetry combine, though it is not of great assistance to the contemporary painter, declares among a hundred perishable truths some that remain immortal. Here are some: 'It is not necessary to mark the outline of a body to which another serves as background, rather should it stand out in its own right'.² 'A white and curved object against another white object will have a faint contour and of those portions which are lit up will be that which is least so. If this contour is placed against a dark ground, it will appear lighter than any other place that is lit up.'³ 'An object will appear distant and detached from

¹ Delacroix has already stated: 'Composition is an organisation of analogies'.

² It is the condemnation of the irritating continuous outline dear to some moderns.

³ This observation becomes of little interest when we are concerned with total, simultaneous vision which implies the generalisation of the 'passages'.

another in the proportion to which its own colour is different from that of the background.'

Students of Seurat will recognise in this the thesis of simultaneous contrast cherished by the painter of *La Grande Jatte*. These reactions of dark objects against light ones have interested painters at all times; first in the domain of pure plastic art, the planes which are separated from each other, the darker parts somehow pushing the lighter further forward; then, in the realm of colour, complementary tones mutually intensifying each other.

It is by systematically exploiting this phenomenon rather than by the practice of classical perspective that painters have come to suggest depth by imposing the elements of their pictures vertically. Once a light ground meets a dark one, you see not a timid juxtaposition of different values but a contrast taken immediately to its degree of maximum intensity. This mechanical system of light on dark, dark on light, animates all the great traditional landscapes. It may be said that the art of the composed landscape died of the abandonment of this system of contrasts which is responsible not only for the framework but the movement of the picture. If a light plane pushes forward the dark plane in front of it and if the former in its turn is pushed forward by the dark plane which follows it, a succession of waves is started up from the top to the bottom of the composition, an incessant to and fro movement of values which cancel each other out only after they have given the spectator the sensation of depth. The picture is swept by a kind of series of waves shored up one against the other to bring about this artificial chase after the third dimension.

In Patinir's *Saint Jerome* (plate 26), this system of staking out is employed with care and enormous application. You see the first wave coming into being on the left, dark against the second, light one, the latter darkened at its edge so as to stand out against the next plane plunged in a transparent half-tone. This half-tone becomes a powerful value contrasted with the great lightness arranged behind it, which appears as violent as this only because a screen of trees lends it vitality. But this screen of foliage assumes such authority only because the ground placed behind it (where a lion can be seen attacking a peasant) is extremely light, surrounded as it is by a belt of dark trees.

The examination of this inexhaustible work could be pursued indefinitely; the juxtaposition of the screens is inflexible; it is never monotonous, thanks to the knowledge of dimensions that is applied. For it is not merely a matter of practising a classic procedure scrupulously and as it were blindly but, with the help of innumerable tricks and inventions, of making the game attractive.

These irregular strips of various values avoid monotony by their different outlines, the variety of their proportions and above all by their ornamental content; here, texture of earth, facets of pebbles and rocks, elsewhere embroidery of foliage or silk of grasses, further away, crystal shapes of the houses; dead branches sticking up everywhere and people silhouetted light

against dark or dark against light, in accordance with the law of the stronger contrasts.

This recession, therefore, which had always haunted the minds of painters, finds its essential technique in the use of screens; each 'field' pushing back the next one, the eye manoeuvred first in front, then behind, creates the third dimension for itself in this way. Genius lay in compensating for each recession by an *equivalent* advance by means of the continual repetition of each item in the picture. Deprived of this device, the eye would scan the horizon, the distance, in one sweep unexcited by these successive resistances, which, by holding back its desire for space, afford it a subtle pleasure. This depth realised by the mind is, one realises, of a different quality, another essence, if one may say so, from that physical depth, which, offered to the guilty eye, seems to create a hole in the panel and takes from it the mural character which so many generations of painters have so rightly respected.

It is necessary to repeat: the picture, whatever the requirements of the subject represented may be, must remain faithful to its own structure, to its fundamental two-dimensions. The third dimension can only be suggested; of this double necessity are born most of the inventions of the art of painting. You can see to what extent this quite modern theory of space, *imitated*, exalted in 1830 by some ignorant critics, is in disagreement with tradition. It resulted in the sinister panorama, those pictures divided into two distinct yet disconnected parts, the lower part coinciding more or less with the ground, dark, the upper part, with the sky, the eye being carried towards an immeasurable horizon.

The public always shows a marked preference for the absurd. If you arrive in a new district and you inquire about the beauty spots, you will not fail to be told of the points from which you can gain the longest view. For a century now, since painting has become popular, thanks to the exclusive cheating of bad painters, the 'most beautiful' has become synonymous with 'the most distant'. The height of ecstasy for the public is not to let the eye wander over a given succession of natural events and enjoy the plastic reactions, but to descry the next town without the help of binoculars; the sensation of pleasure will be all the stronger if the distance can be measured in miles. The time has come to get away from this stupid athletic æsthetic which confuses the physical pleasure of increased lung-expansion with the enjoyment derived from the contemplation of changes of form and colour, and the understanding of the familiar human character set off by every part of nature transformed by the ingenious peasant.

Patinir, in that landscape in the centre of which Saint Jerome is hidden, certainly makes sacrifices to 'view-points', but he superimposes and to some extent cancels them out by repeating them; furthermore, with the help of vigorous interplay with screens he corrects their commonplace flight. Everything is clear, written, now in a tight minute hand, now broad and flourishing. Nothing evanescent or inaccessible; the clouds on the horizon are as clear as

the earth of the foreground. The great mass of dark rocks at the centre, cut out against a broad, clear vista, is violently projected on to the same plane as the ground where the saint's hut is perched, and the last clear rock which terminates the composition on the left, similarly pushed back by the vast triangular cloud drawn behind it like a piece of sombre drapery, is miraculously placed on the same level as the two preceding planes, that is on the plane of the picture itself, faithful through all these liberties, these vibrations and these eddies, to the initial verticality of the wall.

It is because of their rediscovery of this science of compensations of volumes that Cézanne, Renoir and Seurat were so great: in the midst of modern deliquescence they constructed the only landscapes which, in their built-up planes, express depth without ever attaining it in a silly way; the only landscapes where you can carry out an ideal walk, not on your feet, but with your mind. These constructions offer us a monumental succession of natural elements linked in some way by the steps of a false staircase, leaving ground open to the sky but with the last step returning cleverly to the level of the first.

Passages

These combinations of volumes in tiers would be purely didactic, lifeless and untrue if they were not softened by 'passages'. The passage which with luck may not trouble the painter of still-life whose eyes have no difficulty in taking in the whole view, is for the landscape painter a primordial element from the twofold point of view of realism and poetry. For a landscape is formed not only from a succession of trees, stretches of countryside, and houses, but also by the atmosphere which is at certain points shown by haze that saturates the forms, by a silky fog that unites the separate elements, giving a real pictorial unity to the view.

Having once embarked on the conquest of external phenomena the painter, abandoning the pure calligraphy of the mural painter and illuminator, had to pursue his inquiry to its very end and integrate plastically those elements seemingly most incompatible with the continuous line. Trained to see all form through the combination of clear, geometrical symbols, he was careful not to drown all the contours in this aerial impasto in order to express atmosphere; the plastic element would have crumbled at once. One solution was possible: in order that the effacing of a part of the contour should not take anything away from the general solidity, this clearness, so sacrificed, had to be compensated for on the parts that were spared; the hardness of the form had to be exaggerated to allow it to disappear in the distance with impunity. There is no need for me to follow the contours painted by Patinir with my finger for the reader to note that if they are smooth in the parts reserved for atmosphere, they are clear and dry

in those made with the idea of giving us back the object so compromised. Thus, instead of drenching all the points of the form in a timid mist, the plastic painters separate each object into two parts, one that is to be sacrificed to the atmospheric envelope and which will disappear completely, another upon which all the plastic elements taken from the first will be brought to bear.

It was Impressionism which restored atmospheric fluidity so unbelievably scorned by so many landscape painters who are fascinated by the *material* contours of objects. Let us look for an example, since we can learn as much by considering bad pictures as from masterpieces, and we must know what to avoid as much as what should be stated. I recommend you then to have a look at *Chaumière* by Harpignies (the imbecile's Corot) still hanging in the *Petit Palais*. In it you will see a hard and false delimitation of all the contours; walls, branches, leaves, hatefully silhouetted, do not yield for a single moment to the caresses of light or shadow. You would think that the painter had taken a razor instead of brush. The same subject painted by Corot would have been the scene of a supple and true play between parts of the branches and leaves emphatically outlined and discreetly introduced blurrings.

Impressionists considerably extended this system of compensating for the clear-cut by means of 'passages'. The greatest, with Cézanne at the head, have carefully settled this *equally balanced* proportion between these two elements. This is why Cézanne has exercised such a deep influence on contemporary painting; he was the custodian of the greatest, the most indisputable truth. To the physical and bureaucratic truth of Harpignies he opposed the only truth that counts, truth to sensation. But Impressionism did not only embrace equilibrists of genius. There was at the opposite pole from Cézanne, Claude Monet who progressively neglected the expression of the plastic elements to give himself up exclusively to that of 'passages'; in the *Nymphéas*, the whole thing consists of 'passages'.

It was with these two dangers: inhuman, improbable hardness, objects on every side reduced to silhouettes, and their complete submergence, that the new painters, dubbed cubists, found themselves confronted. The public has still a very imperfect understanding of their effort. It was a question of identifying forms without ceasing to express their partial eclipse. To particularise objects and allow them to integrate with each other at certain points so as to form a whole that the eye embraced at one glance; such was their initial programme. We have seen that it is the most traditional of all, and following after Impressionism, the only reasonable one. The work of Claude Monet is too considerable, it has had too big an influence on modern technique for us to criticise its least significant aspect; one can only say that in the eyes of the lover of traditional painting, *primarily plastic*, his pictures lack first and foremost architectural support and his forms, caught in a wonderful magma, seem insufficiently differentiated. It is the fairy dance of atoms presented to us by a man whose genius fell

into concord with the discoveries of modern science; but this transcendent view inevitably lacks that free-and-easiness, that familiarity which endows Breughel's works with a certainly more human expression and a more universal appeal. It is not always good to consider the world from the point of view of Sirius.

The same reproach can be levelled later at complete cubism, although some painters have tried many times to introduce by '*trompe l'œil*' deception, that familiar stunt, packet of tobacco, pipe, playing cards, label, etc into their compositions.

Monet and his disciples restored the 'passage' then by introducing it indiscriminately. It was incumbent on the Cubists, rationalising the process, to localise the effects so as to oppose the converse process to it; the bounding of form particularised to a degree. Thus we note once more that in art there is no progress, only *discovery illumined by methods as old as the world itself*. This very return to the old procedures of Breughel and Patinir is a proof of the youth of Cubism. The essential thing is that this discovery should be violent and enthusiastic and not present itself like a dismal and resigned heritage such as one sees under the roofs of the Quai Malaquais Prison.

It is most essential to insist on a primordial point: the 'passage', destined in the minds of the Cubists to counterbalance the geometrisation of the contour of objects, became an element in the picture for the same reason as the contrast of which it is the natural counterpart. I am sorry to be unable to provide more examples of these researches, the truly providential character of which is not sufficiently appreciated. Numerous ones can be found in the *Histoire de l'Art Contemporain* published by the Cahiers d'Art. The 1914 war, demoraliser, destroyed that veritable 'renaissance of classical feeling', to borrow from a valuable book by Robert Rey a title not belied by the commentaries he makes in it.¹

This order of research based on a study of chiaroscuro (responsible for such admirable works as those of Léger and Delaunay, already mentioned, the *Football* and the *Dépiquage* of Albert Gleizes) was followed round about 1917-1918 by purely chromatic experiments always on the 'passage', considered as a unifying element of forms into a coherent whole, and constituting the picture-microcosm.

The 'passage' consists then of spreading in some way *by the side of the object* a value which is borrowed from it, light or dark (see figures on pages 21 and 22). But if this chiaroscuro technique is replaced by that of colour, if *modelling* gives way to *flat tint*, how can the necessary passage for the compensation of the elements be contrived? Only by spreading similarly over the background distance, *tints borrowed from the object* and which, in colour-symbolism, express the dark and the light (as we know, it is a bluish tint for shadow, an orange tint for light). The half-tint, then, will be constituted by the specific colour of the object, it will 'pass' equally, if necessary. That is the 'sensory' origin of these

¹ Publisher: *Les Beaux Arts*.

displacements of tones outside the forms, these organisations of coloured portions which characterise the majority of modern works that have emerged from Cubism. Many of these works are decorative rather than really pictorial, but it does not follow that the method should be condemned (it has produced too many masterpieces from the Northern Primitives to Van Gogh for that), only the shallowness of the artists who use it. Extreme rapidity of execution should perhaps also be deprecated. It is not always the method chosen which is at fault but the way it is applied, and perhaps the absence of this essential virtue which I crave forgiveness for mentioning in a purely technical book, a virtue which, you must readily admit, sanctifies and animates the rest, the virtue of enthusiasm and love. If you apply a method without intense conviction, unless you bring to it incessant modifications at the dictates of your feelings, you are merely carrying out good exercises or decorative studies.

The *Couronnement de la Vierge* by Enguerrand Charonton or the *Avignon Pietà* are obviously decorative works, but they are not just decoration; they go a very long way towards a domain which transcends painting. They teach you that first and foremost you must be a good workman, next that, while calculating lines, spaces and colours, you must never cease to be *inspired*.

Light

In a very arbitrary fashion I have separated the study of aerial passages from that of phenomena of light. The truth is, they form (pictorially speaking) only one, since these passages can be effected only when two superimposed planes submitted to a gradation of tints, that is a phenomenon strictly concerned with light, both offer the connecting link of similar values.

There are painters, however, who, quick to express the successive values which cover an object subjected to the light, find themselves disarmed when it becomes a question of submitting some of these values to atmospheric fusion. There are others who, haunted by their preoccupation with the outer covering, swathed their forms with cotton wool on all contour lines. Carrière was one. In the *Salon Carré* at the *Louvre* two equally bad canvases of Daubigny are to be seen which sacrifice with equal intemperance; the first to the generalised exterior (*Le Printemps*), the second to systematic dryness (*La Mare*), where the mauve of the rocks and trees, sharply outlined against the sky, is not subjected at any point in the 'passage' which in the companion picture prevails to an exaggerated degree. It is readily understandable that the truth lies in neither direction, and the traditional method, the only one which can reserve the rights of plastic handwriting, consists of combining the two processes, each object reserving one of its parts to formal expression, the other to aerial music. Here we find discrimination between the architectural and musical values that we established in the

chapter 'Colour Value'; we are going to establish it for a third time with reference to grey and pure colours in the chapter on 'Colour'. We must insist on this fact: the main fault of every beginner and even every painter not yet in possession of the mastery of his craft, since he has not got a rational technique, is to put *a little of everything everywhere*. A little colour, a little grey, a little contrast, or the suggestion of an outer covering on all portions of the outline, a little light, a little shade; the result is weakness, lack of expression. Pictures so painted do not express reality, they are a mechanical tracing, for the characteristic of reality lies precisely in not being a work of selection: reality offers everything at one and the same time. The picture which instead of proposing a choice amid this affluence, presents a recapitulation of the elements offered, does not answer the question set; it merely sets it anew. This question, not always easy to understand, is raised by the commands of masters now dead and by the yearnings of the present-day public which vaguely hopes for some unexpected and original choice from the accumulation of natural elements.

To return to Patinir, who at the moment provides material for our inquiry, we have seen that screens necessary for the dynamic play of volumes, pass into each other at certain points in accordance with a system of blurring which prevails from one end of the composition to the other. These escape-points of the elements discernible in nature are the most distant points of the major contrasts, those where equal values are superimposed from one plane to the next. Planes submitted to the action of light pass through a series of values which move from the lightest to the darkest. When a light and a dark plane are placed one above the other, there is always a place suitable for their intersection and fusion: it is where the dark plane is lit in such a way as to be scarcely discernible from that where the light plane darkens. The art consists in weaving these gradated planes like the sides of a basket so that, without losing their personal accent, they unite and interlace, forming an indivisible whole, a palpitating conglomerate.

We are beginning to learn that the vigilance of the painter must not be exercised solely for the benefit of each element and that it must aim at their suppression no less than their emphasis. The landscape painter should try and establish the union between objects instead of unreasonably aiming at their false and completely intellectual delineation. To find that musical passage, it is enough to seek it out. Everything you want is to be found in nature but you have to be educated enough *to want to find only what is required*.

With the idea of making the phenomenon of the 'passage' more comprehensible, I thought it would be useful to build up a precise theory of 'open figures'.

Cézanne, for demonstrations of this kind at the request of Emile Bernard, reduced all natural forms to a sphere, a cone or a cylinder. If we take the sphere as a symbolic form and examine all the phases of its appearance, we arrive at the three following possibilities:

1. The sphere is shown against a dark ground, its lighted part will stand out violently against the ground. The part placed between the main light and the dark part will stand out very slightly against this ground, but the part in the shadow, being of the same value as the dark ground *will merge into this ground*.



2. The background is grey; the light part of the sphere will appear less so than before, but it will stand out definitely enough in accordance with the law of simultaneous contrast; the part in the shadow will stand out dark against the background which, in accordance with the same law, will appear clearer all round, but the intermediate part, where the half-tint is located, will merge into the background of the same value.

3. The ground is light. There is no need for explanations to guess that the lighted part of the sphere will merge into the background, the half-tint and the complete shadow will stand out against the background with a progressive intensity.

You see then that a *volume never stands out against the background in all its parts*; there is always a connecting point between the foreground and the background. When you draw a form uninterruptedly from one end to the other, it is not because you see it too well but on the contrary because you are inattentive: you are supplementing the sensory operation of the spontaneous notation of the phenomena by a completely cerebral notation. You are drawing what you know of the objects instead of drawing only what you distinguish of them. You can find aesthetes who will defend this operation of the uninterrupted outline but you will not find a masterpiece (having light as its subject) to justify it.

To this theory of the sphere one might add the theories of the cylinder and the cone; this will pose the same problem, complicated by that of reflection more easily discernible than in the sphere. This theory might be called the 'theory of three contours'. It seems that I should tackle it, since all living form, human body, tree trunk, shell, is in some way composed of a series of spheres, cylinders, and cones connected by a series of sculptural passages. The whole is linked up and based on a 'spiral surface'. It may be useful then to complete the study of the sphere by that of the cylinder and the cone.

If you place one of these solids in one of the situations already considered, in addition to the 'passage' phenomenon, you get the accident of the interior shadow, sometimes very difficult to eliminate. Ingres after Cranach succeeded

by reducing the musculature to the minimum, making up for the interior modelling by deformation of the contour. Few others after him have been able to practise this clever sleight of hand without falling into the faults of weakness and pomposity. Rubens on the other hand and Jordaens even more have always been faithful to the internal modelling; they got more fascinated, it appears, by the drawing of the interior shadow than by the external contrasts, which in their work mostly fade out and merge into the backgrounds. I must refer my reader to the admirable sketch by Rubens which is in the *Salle Dutuit* at the *Petit Palais*, a masterpiece of painting in which all the operations I have analysed are carried out with extraordinary proficiency and ease. When the interior drawing is emphasised, the outer contour passes into one of the large light-surfaces which broadly cut across the composition and die away at the greatest possible distance from the starting-point.

The reflection determines then an interior light. This shadow, being added to those applied on the exterior outline, tends to diminish the form which it is the artist's aim to broaden if he wants to achieve style. The artist is obliged then to choose between the exterior and the interior, between contrast limiting the object and the interior shadow which tends to break it up. The latter was admirably practised by Rembrandt, Rubens and almost all the Flemish painters of the 16th and 17th centuries. Here, then, reduced to diagrammatic form are the three ways in which the cylinder or the cone can retrieve its style at the same time as counting in the picture only as elements sacrificed to the whole.

1. The cylinder is placed against a dark ground. The contrast will be almost as violent on the reflection side as on the direct lighting side. The object enclosed between two contrasts must not be diminished further by an interior accident of light. This middle shadow should then be very much lightened, reduced to an almost imperceptible shadow, as in Cranach (plate 19) or else, as in Rubens, be replaced by a cool tone *almost as light as the warm tones of the lighting and reflection*. In this case the passage takes place inside.



2. The background is grey. The contrast on the direct lighting side will not be so violent as before and the reflection less perceptible; on the other hand, the interior shadow will be very marked. It will be a good thing then not to over-emphasise light and shadow but to underline the interior shadow and provide the passage in the reflection.

3. The background is light. One realises that the passage takes place on the lighter side of the cylinder or cone, that the edge opposed to the light will stand out emphatically against the background and the reflection produce only a faint interior shadow. Hence the theory: If you have to choose between three contrasts, it is necessary, in order to avoid breaking up the form too violently, to exaggerate any single one of the contrasts, diminish the second and suppress the third altogether.

EXAGGERATION, DIMINUTION, SUPPRESSION are the three operations which the artist must constantly practise whether it is a matter of lines, values, colours or surfaces.

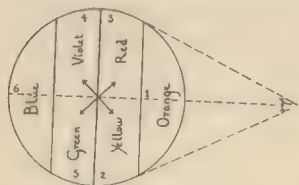
Colour-light

This study would be incomplete unless I connected it up with that on colour. Every day I see hesitating painters wondering whether they should express light by cool or warm tones; one day they opt for the former, the next for the latter. They subordinate their conception of painting to the whim of their impressions with the result that their picture lacks unity; it is as if two hostile painters had shared the job. It would be easy to learn our lesson from some gallery pictures, painted in oils and not in fresco, for in the second case the lights are often decomposed by the chalk or conceived outside all realistic discipline of colour (see the *Saint Sebastian* by Mantegna in the *Louvre*, which is more sculptural than pictorial). But it is Cézanne once again who, still more convincingly than the master colourists, gives us in an irresistible manner the key of traditional luminous chromatism. His theory may be reduced to this: light is orange, shadow its complementary, blue; the half-tint is the 'passage' from orange to blue through the intermediate tones of red-violet and violet-blue. (It is possible to pass similarly from orange to blue by borrowing the other part of the spectrum, whether yellow, yellow-green, green-blue, but there again a choice must be made.) It is such a choice as this that sets the general tonality of the work, since the drama of light takes place over a ground of half-tints. The proportion prescribed has been defined once and for all by Rubens in one of his three treatises on painting entitled *De Coloribus*: two-thirds, half-tints; one-third, only, additional light and shadow.

We can verify the Rubens theory in front of his *cleaned* pictures; it is applied with infallible severity.

This necessity for opting for half at most of the spectrum tones corresponds to what I have said earlier about colour in the chapter on chiaroscuro. If you apply this discipline to the sphere, you obtain the following scheme: the part nearest to the eye or that most in the light, in a word, the point which is to appear most solid, will have orange as its dominating colour. The part most

deprived of light or the part furthest removed from the eye, the part which is to appear the least solid, will possess the *blue dominant*. To effect the 'passage' from orange to blue, all that remains to be done is to put on each side of the orange the two primary colours which compose it: the yellow and the red, and in the adjoining divisions, the mixture of each of these primary colours with blue. That will give violet next to the red, green alongside the yellow. The orange and blue coming on the horizontal, the complementary colours will occur on the diagonal.



It would be too complicated to build up a theory of colour relations which act most authoritatively on our psycho-physiological mechanism. In addition, each painter's unconscious mind invents his own individual combinations. The effectiveness of the latter, moreover, varies according to the arrangement of the tones, their degree of respective saturation and their area, making a living and practical theory of colour harmony almost impossible.

Let us note, however, for our guidance, that since Impressionism, which has given a position of honour to violet, this colour scorned by the old masters, one of the most agreeable and widespread harmonies (Bonnard and Matisse excel in its use, and the Chinese got remarkable effects from it) is that of the triangle 4, 5, 1, violet, green, orange, or that of the opposite triangle 3, 2, 6, red, yellow, blue, beloved of Van Gogh.

I must remind you in this connection that when three colours are together, only one must be taken to its maximum degree of intensity, the second must be diminished and the third merely hinted at. Incidentally we are verifying the theory of the three strengths and their order: 1, big; 2, medium; 3, suppressed or just hinted at.

It is no less necessary to remember that *there is no colour without grey*, that grey is in some way the support, the justification of all colour harmony, whether it enters into the composition of the colours, as in El Greco, Velasquez and Goya, or is placed round about in the form of white, black or grey, isolating the pure tones and opposing themselves to any formidable interferences.¹

To become really convinced of the eloquence of greys and the singular faculty which these tones have of being enlivened by contrasts, there is nothing more amusing than the following game: pick out from any old pieces of paper or rag all those which can be grouped under the same label, let us say grey-yellow.

¹ Braque, Picasso, Rouault and Matisse make a masterly use of these governing elements anticipated by Manet and Cézanne, but for some time we have seen them somewhat too lazily adopted in the form of a continuous black line in the stained-glass window style. It then becomes pure decoration.

Place these fragments of different sizes and shapes on a sheet of white paper; you will be surprised to note that tones of the same kind, hardly differentiated, will be animated by their juxtaposition. If you slide some black paper under some of them, allowing in some places the white of the background to have its effect here and there, you will get a pattern full of life, almost enough for the basis of a picture. You only have to add this discreet symphony, here a complementary tone, of the blue-grey family, further away a pretty violent tone of the same nature – an orange, and you will have a total effect of considerable liveliness.

Drawing

Paul Valéry made some subtle and necessary statements on the subject of drawing. He rightly makes a distinction between normal, casual observation of objects and the purposeful view we take with pencil in hand. Everything that has bearing on the perception, movement of the eyes, eager to seize the outline of the forms and 'preserve a clear vision', must then be retained.

The point is to know whether the highest function of drawing is to *preserve* the clear vision over the full extent of the objects. If you examine a Rembrandt drawing you at once notice that even if he is making a portrait or a study of some object he never draws round it a complete surrounding contour. Considerable breaks of the form outside and inside are to be noticed; these are 'passages'. They are there because the painter-draughtsman is not considering the form abstractly, independent of chiaroscuro (unless he wants to paint flat as Cranach sometimes did) but as it appears when submitted to the devouring action of light and shade. The genuine painter, sensitive to modelling values, cannot help seeing the object under the influence of these outside phenomena which I have already considered and the fixation of which should be undertaken along with that of the specific character of the object in question. The painter's creed will be: *There is no closed figure in Nature*. An egg or a fruit has a continuous surface only when held in the hand; subjected to sunlight the forms open like the pomegranate and reveal their true nature. Let us ponder with our documents before us the art of Rembrandt and conclude: *the painter represents only open figures*.

This phenomenon of the interrupted outline, of the passage of one object into another becomes more complicated if, no longer considering these objects piecemeal, we submit the whole to simultaneous vision. We then see only the main points of contrast emerging from the general half-tint: the very light portions against the dark ground or very dark parts against the light background. It is this phenomenon that Rembrandt has revealed so wonderfully, without pedantry and with extraordinary subtlety, no less in his drawings than in his paintings.

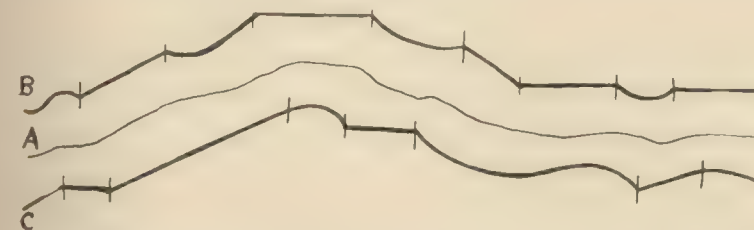
If, on the other hand, we examine an oriental drawing or finished sketch by Cranach, we find no such interruptions of form, because the expression of the object is no longer experienced as volume but in the surge, the sinuosity, the flight and return of the line. This does not mean that the actual is any less overstepped and outraged for the sake of that emphasis, great preciousity and plasticity which comes under the head of *Interdependence of symbols*. In Rembrandt this interdependence is expressed by the irruption of light or dark areas in the body of the object; but in this case it will be expressed by *distortion*. If you trace a line, straight or curved, on a piece of paper, you will immediately determine on each side of this line up to the edge of the sheet unequal areas which will be in a relation that your instinct or knowledge of the laws of rhythm will consider pleasant or unpleasant. In the second case, most likely, the line will be changed, its curves swelled or flattened; the object which is the pretext for this operation will become modified without either the interest it inspires or the emotion it reflects being thereby diminished. If you want to make the observation that it is not one symbol, but ten, a hundred which have got to live *on good terms* with each other and within the framework of the sheet of paper without the general character of the object being profoundly modified, you can readily understand that this search for the exact outline by the eyes of the painter is in no way the essential part of the artistic operation.

The draughtsman careful about organising his representative symbols on the page or panel will therefore be led by his careful management of the harmonious exchanges between all the lines to give as much interest to what is *between the objects* as to the objects themselves. For him there are neither voids nor solids, but surfaces which require, in order to ensure delectation of the spectator, an arrangement in a certain relationship; analogies and differences must be measured according to fixed laws. What are these laws? Let us try to sketch them out.

First the surface must be organised rhythmically (that is a primary operation that I shall consider in the chapter on composition) so as to give it a plastic interest with a series of clear well-articulated signs which will bring out their respective values by their interactions; a right angle affords a better appreciation of the opening of an obtuse angle or the roundness of a taut curve. If the pure signs which for want of a better term I refer to as 'geometrised' (mathematicians, please forgive me) are reduced in quantity, their combinations are infinite. There is no waving or flabby form the indeterminacy of which cannot be corrected by the application of these signs, and their connection will be clearly emphasised. Certain painters, having more taste than knowledge, are expert in copying this apparent fluidity of form with an elegant line, free from all geometric pretensions. The result then is a drawing that is illustrative more than pictorial and fated, whatever may be the zest applied to its execution, soon to be forgotten.

These plastic signs of course should be all the more eloquent and differentiated as the skill required to animate them takes modelling more into account, the effect of chiaroscuro being to blur the contours. For modelling in the round, one may prescribe straight lines; for a flat tint, a drawing rich in curved inflexions signifying the absent modelling. Cranach's drawing is compensated by vibrations in the modelling; Titian's or Michelangelo's, deprived of the softness of the modelling, is dominantly in straight lines.

By way of clarification, here is a diagram showing an inert line A and, above and below it its geometrical expression. All the inflexions of the natural line that are too elusive are to be found in the transposed lines B and C; it is possible, of course, to draw many others, *all different but all resembling the original*.



Paul Valéry tells us that Degas frequently 'shouted' the following aphorism: 'Drawing is not form, it's the way of seeing the form', an excellent formula, the only missing item being the explanation of how the painter can see the form. We have just noted that Rembrandt and Cranach saw it very well, but in radically different manners. It is perhaps necessary to pontificate a little and try to define more precisely, as a craftsman, the system of traditional relations which exist between painting and drawing, the unequal proportions of which constitute particular 'genres', each having their own techniques which cannot be mixed with impunity.

Painting is a means of giving life to the drawing, of bringing the form to full florescence.

You can only learn to paint by drawing, for drawing is a way of reserving a place for colour in advance.

In order to determine the exact spot where colour should make its voice heard most strongly, the pictorial elements, which in their obvious arrangement constitute banal reality, should be separated and arranged in a certain way. These elements are: light, half-tint and dark; the ornament (elements of the drawing).

Colour which is divided into tones and tints; the latter element being rebellious to representation by white and black.

Each of the first two elements requires special separate study, for the superimposition, even in black and white, of the ornament on the chiaroscuro would soon result once more in banal reality (the eyelashes, *ornament* on the *modelled* eye).

The final introduction of colour on to such an evil superimposition would end by being a photograph and nothing more, *i.e.* a complete return to that impersonal reality which must be avoided if a higher kind of reality is to be attained. Such a higher reality is obtained by establishing a formal hierarchy among the above-mentioned elements, one of them having the greatest possible predominance over the others.

All artistic expression involves thus the primordial and tyrannical choice of one element at the expense of the others. Above all it is a question of organising a system of preferences.

By way of example, the Le Nain brothers and El Greco establish the dominance of chiaroscuro over colour and ornament. They model forms in grey tones, renounce decorative '*trompe-l'œil*' effects of the Primitives.

The Orientals, on the contrary, even more than the Primitives, reduce modelling, to replace it by ornament or symbol, chiselled as it were in all its details: leaves, pebbles, birds' feathers, hair, eyebrows, nostrils, lips, decoration of fabrics, etc. In this case, things are reduced to absolute ornament by drawing alone, *the colour is too pure to have on it the imitation in relief of anything at all*; that is why the objects are *symbolised* instead of being *imitated*. Everything that 'turns' is drawn curved instead of being rounded by a *gradation*, which, if imposed on colour, would appear too real, hateful because it would be outside the discipline adopted.

The Japanese had a very happy method of teaching the child drawing. The procedure had the virtue of accustoming the child to seeing forms in a geometric way and making him grasp the life behind action; it consisted of getting him to draw first various circles, rectangles and triangles and represent men and animals by the juxtaposition of these figures. An excellent way of amusing the child by representing drawing as a game. The very valuable work from which I am extracting the following diagrams, offers hundreds of combinations of seven rectilinear shapes, large, medium and small. The first exercise consists in representing objects, animals and persons by placing these shapes against each other. The second in uniting forms enticed in this way by a single line.



I do not know whether this admirable discipline would be of the kind to please the schoolchildren of our day. It is certainly inclined to make one think that it would be a good thing to habituate the young artist from a very early age to consider geometry and truth as inseparable and introduce all representation of reality as a game.

Here is a means of forcing the child or any beginner into the art of drawing by the adoption of geometrised plastic writing:

Note in a natural scene or on a table the difference in volume and *character* of the objects. The roof is pointed, this cloud is oval, this tree has an uneven edge; this one is rounded, etc. On this table we have an orange and a lemon. The orange is round but the lemon is long with a fat pointed end. These two fruits must be *differentiated* as far as possible, reduced to pure symbol so that they become true to life. It is essential that the spectator should find the drawn shape convincing. Hence the greatest possible number of specific elements must be accumulated in the delimitation of each object. Such a differentiation is at the root of all representation.

This discipline (which must always be presented to the child as a game) should be extended to colour, proportion, ornament and values. The rhythm, composition, chiaroscuro, passage, all these are reserved for the more advanced course. They are the added touches to the work and suitable for the consolidation of the discoveries of sensibility.

Here then is the programme which follows from these considerations:

First exercise: Grasp the character of the subject. This character is obtained by the exaggerated differentiation between these objects. You must take away from them what they have in common for the sake of what they show by way of contrast and specific characteristics.

(a) The character is in the external form; round, square, oblong, jagged, even, etc.

(b) Value: two bunches of grapes in this fruit-dish: a black and a golden bunch. The black must be made quite black and the light bunch the same value as the white fruit-dish: the colour will suffice to separate the bunch from the dish. It will be light yellow, the fruit-dish light blue (both of the same value).

(c) Dimensions: a fig and a pear offer closely approximating forms. After separating them as much as possible by distortion and value (the fig dark, the pear very light), they must be separated also and individualised by proportions. The fig will be still smaller than in reality, the pear larger.

(d) Ornament: This ruffled cloth on which fruits are placed is thrown across a wooden table which has a very obvious grain. You must be very mistrustful of the plastic resemblance offered by the folds of the cloth and the figuring of the wood. If the latter has a predominantly curved character, the folds of the cloth must be broken up as much as possible.

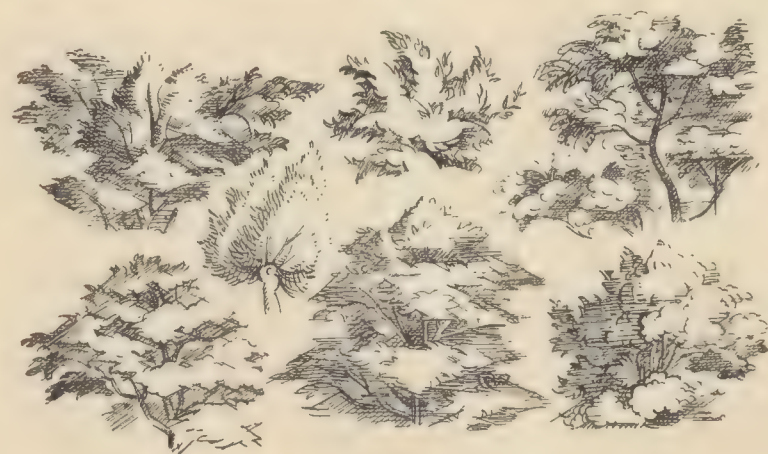
Considered from this angle, all objects abound in ornament. The very substance may even serve as a pretext for its surface decoration: grainy, cross-hatched, etc. Even shadows that are cast may be represented by hatchings or black dots. The following order is that recommended for working out the clear differentiation between the lines; for opposing the lineaments of expression in the most effective manner possible. These differences will be of three kinds:

- (1) Dimensions: large, small, medium.
- (2) Decoration: vertical, horizontal, oblique, straight, continuous, broken-up, etc.
- (3) Choice: whether spaced out, close together, overlapping.

Note 1. When consideration for truth to life or the requirements of composition demand resemblances, these must be systematically emphasised. Example: the curve of a head or chair will be parallel to that of a mirror or an armchair back, or the moiré of a dress will imitate artificial graining.

Note 2. Among decorations must be distinguished those which you can obtain by line from those which may arise from the substance itself; impasto, apparent brush strokes, etc. In the last-mentioned case, chiaroscuro appears as superfluous: it constitutes, in fact, a particular and adequate means of animating the surface: the superimposition of two procedures pursuing the same end would therefore be a monstrosity. Ornament will make use of the flat tint to which it will give life. Moreover, portions not animated by decoration will be kept for contrast in values.

I think it would be useful to reproduce here some specimens of trees engraved by Jerome Cock after drawings by Breughel. Each tree is enclosed in a clearly defined geometric figure and rises, opens out, forms shelves or whorls in accordance with a very strongly emphasised rhythm.



The Impressionist Revolution

It is not too much to state that at the present time, in spite of many æsthetic revolutions, most painters remain impressionist in mentality, although none of them in actual fact is a practising impressionist. If one excepts a category of artists hostile to all representation of nature and who practise abstract art, a

subject upon which I am not called upon to give my opinion here, painters indeed for the most part unversed in first inventing the real and then constructing it from all the pieces with the sole help of memory, continue to demand the essential of their art from direct impression. One can only reproach them with limiting their effort to the spontaneous notation of inevitably short sensations and cutting themselves off in this way from all access to an art that is on the grand or monumental scale.

The Impressionist Masters never gave up their taste for the universal, the ambition to attain to great classical constructions. The revolution which they made was in fact no more than a revival; that of a whole pantheistic vision of nature and a technique concerned with the expression of space and the interactions of the phenomena of light.

It is to Rubens again that we must go back to recapture the circular, recapitulatory gaze, which from an ideal centre-point – the axis of the picture – fixes in ordered, quivering whirlwinds the elements of the scene, immobilised taut, twisted and molten, on a closed rhythm. If you compare a Primitive landscape to these vast dynamic conglomerates, you can see that it has been conceived in an entirely different spirit. Instead of summing up and embracing, the Primitive makes an inventory of the objects and arranges them with humility like a book-keeper under his master's eye. If, thanks to architectural discipline, he manages to endow his work with unity, all the elements which compose it remain visible, detached from each other. When a human action intervenes, the expressive actions are as it were suspended, frozen like the pendulum at the top of its swing. The general arrangement is always static.

For representations of heaven the Primitive keeps his orbs, his scrolls, his superimposing of curves where the angels and saints are installed with God in the centre. When the two realms, heaven and earth, occur together, only the top part is arranged on the arc; the earth is spread out horizontally, the trees and houses rise up at a right-angle. The best that man can do is to kneel down and be a motionless witness of universal gravitation, which is sometimes suggested by the wake of a comet. The symbolic circle descends only upon the heads of the saints. Everything in a Primitive landscape proclaims the idea of transcendence.

In Rubens, that pagan submissive to the practices of the Church, everything proclaims the idea of immanence; the great eddies of the inhabited sky also fill the sea, raise up the land and twist the foliage. The gods of mythology roam the forests alongside God and the angels of the Christian heaven. The Impressionists allow the same kind of indiscriminating eye which notes the same shudder in the heavens, earth and over the waters, the same universal diaper-patterning, to wander over nature. Like Rubens, the Impressionist does homage to the nascent freshness of the world, this garden which flowers each day just as new, just as dazzling for the ingenuous eye which, as Cézanne said, the old die-hards of the Academy have been unable to obstruct.

Carried away into this teeming creation on each occasion, and as it were a prey to the effervescence of the day of creation, the Impressionist participates in the birth; he is no longer the bureaucratic painter sitting on his stool, blinking behind his dirty spectacles, for his spirit soars in company with the spirits of the air; he becomes a bodily part of the scene, espouses its fluid contours, he is borne away in its whirlwinds.

Renoir's *The Barges* that can be seen at the Louvre (Plate 12) are no longer those thick heavy woodlice as depicted by the masters of bitumen and the pendants of the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts*. They are scarabs floating away on pearly eddies and the sky is furrowed by the luminous passage of clouds like great silver caterpillars. No longer any hierarchy; instead, an innumerable host of gods in an iridescent impasto. The sun of the spirit passes through the crystal retina and projects the softened reflections of the spectrum over all creation.

It is thus through the effect of a physical, sensorial participation, as much as through that of a spiritual comprehension that the Impressionist painter adapts himself to the scene, grasps the meaning, really identifies himself with living forms, vibrating with the leaf, spreading with the waters, turning with the eddies of the waves and the air.

Of course there is no question nowadays of a return to these passionate games by applying the same methods. You have only to see in the Salons to what degree of vulgarity, feebleness, the Impressionist technique has fallen, to realise that new times require new methods. The carefree days when one took one's ease in the shade of the oak tree have vanished; the age is a hard and serious one, it seems to call for reflection rather than casualness. A certain heroism is required of which the painters' share consists *first and foremost in drawing*.

It is perhaps because they vaguely feel the necessity of keeping the elements of their pictures within precise lineaments that so many young painters, ostensibly hostile to representational painting, cannot resist drawing those interweaving curves, those sinuous lines the convolutions of which are dictated only by the unconscious.

If you steep yourself properly in the deep significance of Impressionism, if you understand that it obeys as it were primitive impulses, the ingenuous desire to integrate oneself with the outer spectacle and to commune with the elemental gods, the insidious presence in modern art of these contortions seems to have an explanation: they arise vaguely from that fatality which has persuaded innovators since the Cubist movement to continue *with the help of different means* the movement hinted at by Impressionism.

These sinuous, strongly rhythmical lines are to be found in the flourishes used by Dürer to draw the monsters which people the margin of the Maximilian Bible; they are found equally in the famous seals, related to the mazes of the Middle Ages and the East, which along their winding paths lead the difficult way to eternity; they animate the Roman frescoes and the manuscripts of the

11th and 12th centuries.¹ Passing on, you will find similar mazes with the curve as the essential *motif* in the plastic manifestations of savages who have never lost contact with nature. This curve coiled upon itself like the wise serpent, moves over the surface of masks, oars and ritual shields with uninterrupted loops.

These intuitive lines in which you think you can distinguish cycloids with retrogressions and curves and in which the most complicated mathematical combinations seem to be exploited, have a very precise religious sense, and are clothed with profound meaning – to this extent that, according to the initiated, the soul cannot enter the eternal Abode, unless when confronted with one of these drawings, half effaced by the female Guardian of the kingdom of the dead, it is capable of reconstituting the drawing immediately in its entirety.

It is known that ancient Greek writing was without spacing and, covering the surface alternately from right to left and left to right, was meant to be read successively in both directions. It is called 'boustrophedon' because it is like the team which goes over the field to be ploughed from one end to the other, returning on itself and stopping only when the whole field has been ploughed. The thought of the philosopher penetrating the bark of appearances, similarly links up the elements of his dialectic following an uninterrupted movement, which links the deep furrows of his enquiry.

It is always dangerous to take to its logical extreme an idea one brings forward; I cannot however resist the fascinating idea of comparing these *revealed* lines with the governing lines which preside over the building up of the majority of baroque compositions. Those of Rubens, constructed like veritable ideal machines, enclose the natural elements in the torsion of their belts, in their cogs threaded on mysterious pivots; the whole work whirls round within the limits of the frame, containing a closed and severely composed world, in the same way as the great nebulous spirals which adorn the astronomers' sky are composed round their central nucleus.

Cubism

It was the French Cubists who from 1908 to 1914 felt with the greatest intensity, and yet quite intuitively, the necessity for carrying on the Impressionist experiment upon a different plane, the plastic plane. We have seen that this movement had been hinted at on broad lines by Cézanne and Seurat. I have dealt so fully with Cézanne in previous books that there is no need for me to revert to the essentials of his technical message. It will be sufficient for me to mention that, as can be verified on pp 21 and 22, each meeting-point of differently oriented planes gives, by virtue of simultaneous contrast, the maximum clarity at the

¹ The inauguration of the *Musée de la Fresque* in Paris has finally drawn the attention of the public to this grandiose art which has an amazingly modern appearance.

point of junction and hence the maximum of orange on the one, the maximum of dark or blue-violet on the other; in a word, the maximum of solidity in order to compensate the weakness of the outlines subjected to passages. Thus, the great cosmic assimilation of the Impressionists, the dangerous fusion of forms which was to end in the negation of plastic painting in the *Cathedrals* and *Nymphéas* series of Monet, was shifted on to the traditional plane of spatial construction. Seurat, a more scientific and it must be admitted a more specifically French mind than Cézanne, who owed to his Italian origin an invincible inclination towards metaphor and musical allusion, conceived the idea of extending the imitation of this phenomenon to the point of proof and achieving to some extent didactic lyricism, like Poussin in the domain of static equilibrium and El Greco in that of geometrised movement.

For Seurat then, as for Cézanne, each side of the object, escaping from the atmospheric and luminous passage, is a pretext for a light contrast on dark or dark on light. You can see at the Jeu de Paume (and also at the Louvre, reduced to the state of a tinted diagram) the profile of the clown in the foreground standing out on one side, light against the shadow of the circus track, on the other dark against the luminous part of the same track. It is the starting-point of a complete system which radiates over the whole canvas and determines its structure.

Now the Cubists, from the same starting-point but without the preoccupation with prismatic colour dear to Seurat, had the idea, in order to restore complication to a game oversimplified by the abandonment of these coloured modulations, of interesting themselves in the interior of objects no less than in their exterior. Thus they were forced to break up each complex form and reduce to gradated, geometric figures the facets of the interior modelling, what may be called the musculature of the forms, even the reflections and cast-shadows: the simplest objects, a bowl, a plate were broken up by the effect of this analysis; they took as much account of interior planes as of shadows and reflections. The famous traditional theory of choice between the three contours, two exterior and one interior, which I set out in the chapter on Light, was infringed; whence an impression of excessive subdivision which, more surely than the sudden hardness of the drawing, repelled the public despite numerous 'passages' which, though distributed with as much regularity as contrasts, did not fulfil their function of *relieving momentarily an eye* wearied by too much detail.

It was from this need to rediscover the vanished unity without surrendering all former gains that there arose the Cubists' sudden preoccupation with colour. They had the idea of covering up these over-numerous planes with layers of colour of unequal intensity and different dimensions so as to establish a new hierarchy of elements. Colour gained in importance at the expense of forms that became too alike; *the diversity of dimensions without which there is no beauty of expression* was rediscovered. All the modern 'avant-garde' painting lives on a system

of localised areas of colour within which there abound either planes or lines reconstituting the object thus submerged.

Do not imagine that this new technique which allows innumerable liberties along with a return by unknown ways to the most renowned methods of the illuminators and mural painters, was arbitrarily chosen, purely from need for order and as the result of a merely cerebral operation. The ground had been prepared long before. Gauguin, passionate admirer of primitive art, had already chosen this somewhat traditional method of composition 'in surface-areas'. Whenever he wanted to give a very strong coloured impression without introducing into his picture a pure tone which would have exploded, he would spread the broken tone over a wider surface. He laid down the law as follows: one kilogram of green is greener than ten grams of the same colour.

But it was Van Gogh who, flooding his skies with star-like brilliance, the haloes of which were proportioned to the impression he received, gave an emotive basis to these licences. Henri Matisse, who learned a great deal from the Dutch painter, pushed the procedure to its ultimate limits. In Morocco, wanting to paint some natives who were squatting before a wall covered with blue plaster, he could not manage to represent the sensory intensity of the blue, despite all his efforts. In his colourist's sincerity, he, too, was obliged to increase considerably the dimensions of the wall in order to supplement by quantity the quality that he could not otherwise achieve.

Continuing the experiments of Van Gogh and Matisse, real measurements of optical sensations, the Cubists realised that it was not at all necessary to enlarge to such prodigious proportions the object holding the explosive colour; it was enough to leave it to its place *in the dimensions dictated by the harmony of lines and surfaces* while still allowing the area of perceptible colour to spread outside it until the eye was satisfied.

The physician, Charles Henry, in whose works Seurat had found much encouragement, provided innovators with the formula which was to excite their imagination. According to his measurements, the sensation of colour always precedes that of form (by an exceedingly brief interval but one which justifies the dissociation of the form and colour elements). The Cubists, pushing boldness to limits unknown to Van Gogh's disciples, applied themselves, thenceforward, to the systematic separation of local tone, or tone suitable to the object, from local form. This practice gave rise to extremely cerebral combinations; the form of objects was submitted to constructive rhythm independent of that which governed the development of coloured areas. The whole art lay in the arrangement of partial impositions of local tone and of the body of the object.

It is easy to see the benefit the landscape painter can derive from the use of a pictorial technique based on the separation of colour and form and on their organisation, not an independent one, but subjected to a rhythm by virtue of which forms and tones intermingle their movements, coinciding here, diverging

further off, only to come together again later. Similarly in a fugue, the two melodic themes chase each other, catch each other up, only to move apart once more.

Composition of the Picture

The laws that govern the organisation of the elements of the picture are unchangeable because they are bound up with the psycho-physiological mechanism of the individual, but the method of application varies with the nature of the artist. Those actuated by visual sensation whose modern exemplar is Cézanne will look to their impressions for the essential directives: quality of colour, harmony, character of the composition (classical or baroque), disposition of the governing lines; the intellectuals, very well represented by Georges Seurat, start from a preconceived idea which they invest with body and life by means of inventiveness and passion. Their works are habitually of classical tendency: lovers of simple rhythms, visible disciplines, obvious calculations, they divide up the elements of their compositions in such a way that the relations between the various masses, subjected to the reassuring laws of numbers, are strongly apparent. The system adopted will thus be imperious, rectilinear. Most of Seurat's canvases are born under the sign of the right-angle. Thus geometric areas can be easily measured by the eye. When the curve appears, it is well-defined and indicates its centre clearly as in the *Chahut* where the space between the compass points corresponds to one of the divisions of the 'golden section'.

These two masters so widely opposed of the *a priori* and *a posteriori* schools whose works are submitted to the same plastic imperatives, what I will make bold to call the *constants*, are joined by Van Gogh, perfect example of the inspired artist, incapable of examining his reflexes and whose activity gushes forth in a pure effusion. Unskilled in the logical co-ordination of his discoveries, he leaves to his work the so-to-speak abandoned character of a fragment. But we shall see that although his message is less sustained than that of Cézanne and Seurat, it is no less valuable; it opens up vast possibilities discerned (though so far only dimly) by a few modern painters.

What are these laws that the work of art must obey before it attains expression in dignity, before it escapes sentimental slovenliness? What are these profound exigencies to which it must make sacrifices?

Specifically Latin minds, whose type, in France, is incarnated in Poussin and Seurat, with a taste for disinterested speculation and with temperaments rich enough to animate their mental make-up and nourish it on reality, submit the idea of a composition to the influence of the governing lines almost as soon as it is born.

From the *Quattrocento* to the end of the Renaissance, gifted minds, undertaking to express their feelings or their conception of the world with the aid of lines and colours, reflected on the surest means of soliciting or holding the attention of their fellow men. While still considering how to formulate their emotions, they calculated the spell-binding powers of certain combinations of lines and certain harmonies of tones. They soon noticed that the eye, a tyrannical organ, required at the same time to be stimulated by the variety of elements concerned and appeased by certain judiciously placed resemblances. Confronted with a surface divided into fragments, with lines in all directions, a crumpled sheet of paper for example, the eye is bewildered; it finds it fatiguing to follow lines that are assembled in accordance with no known law, and soon gets bored with the sight. On the other hand, before a surface divided in accordance with too obvious a law, a tiled flooring, a grill, the eye is insufficiently solicited and remains uninterested. Contrary to the belief of the layman, the essential of art is not to imitate nature, but *under the guise of imitation* to stir up excitement with pure plastic elements: measurements, directions, ornaments, lights, values, colours, substances, divided and organised according to the injunctions of natural laws. While so occupied, the artist never ceases to be subservient to nature, but instead of imitating the incidents in a paltry way, he *imitates the laws*. Poussin wrote: it is in observing things closely that a painter becomes skilful, rather than in tiring himself copying them. The idea of beauty does not reveal itself in a subject unless the artist has done everything possible to prepare the elements. This preparation consists in three things: order, method, figure or form.

Order signifies the interval of the parts.

Method deals with the quantity.

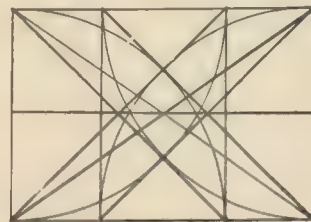
Form is concerned with lines and colours.

Minds trained in the study of natural forms (it is right that I should mention here the very fine and very substantial book by Edouard Monod-Herzen: *Principles of Morphology*) know that natural plastic manifestations: whirlwinds and waterspouts, shell or plant structure, etc, contain in them the most felicitous proportion of those exciting and reassuring elements of which I have just been speaking. Since then, the art of drawing and painting, subservient to the art of feeling, derives its profound laws from morphology. It was by no means an unreasonable thing on the part of the moderns to listen to the teaching of the Africans and Polynesians, for primitive peoples who live in contact with natural forms assume their rhythms and feel their repercussions in a physical way, spontaneously find the combinations of forms which are most literally alive. These representatives of natural forces have much to teach the 'civilised' prisoners of the inhuman machine.

One of their spiritual brothers, Vincent Van Gogh, whispered into the general indifference some essential truths concerning cosmic rhythms; his message is only just beginning to be understood; yet it can provide a complement to the

predominantly cerebral notions, since it has presided over the elaboration of modern works which have been trying to get back, through Seurat and Cézanne to the humanists of the Renaissance.

The reintegration of painting in the realm of tradition was tried in our day with the aid of mathematical rather than emotional processes. Cubism, the first public manifestation of which took place under the sign of the 'Golden Section', pushed the study of traditional processes of the harmonious repartition of the elements of a picture a very long way. The simplest process, employed by various painters before them, and Sérusier in particular, consists in marking the length of the shorter side on the longer side of the rectangle formed by the frame. Repeating the operation on the right and left you get two squares which overlap. If you draw the diagonals of these squares after drawing those of the rectangle, you get a play of oblique lines which design a sort of ideal network in which the natural forms, abandoning their individual 'directions' to wed those thus defined, weave in and out of each other like birds. You feel that the different parts subjected to the ascendancy of these lines *born from the very format of the canvas* are bound up to each other by what is commonly spoken of as rhythm.



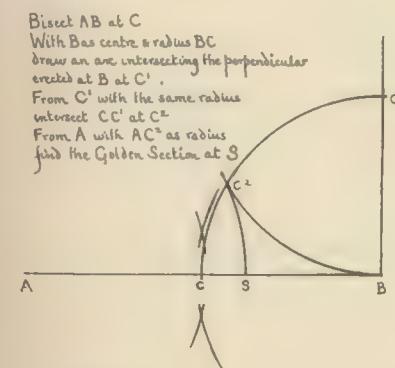
But there is a method of dividing surfaces which to minds trained in meditating on profound laws governing the universe, seems to possess more virtues. It is what Leonardo da Vinci called the *divine proportion*, the study of which Luca Pacioli undertook in the 16th century.

In his book on *Proportions in Nature and in Art* (Nouvelle Revue Française) Monsieur Mathila Ghyka has reminded us that the law of organic growth was dependent in some cases on the Golden Number which enables mathematicians to divide a length in 'mean and extreme ratio' and determines relationships which are very stimulating to the mind and which Vitruvius has defined thus: 'In order that a whole divided in unequal parts shall appear beautiful, there must be between the smaller part and the greater the same relation as between the greater and the whole'.

All the pictures of the Renaissance were constructed on this principle which is to be found in certain frescoes of Pompeii, and which Poussin (after the Gothic artists) was almost the only one to adopt in France in the 17th century, Seurat in the 19th, and the Cubists and Juan Gris, in particular, in the 20th.

Special compasses¹ (you could find them on sale before the war in colourmen's shops, especially in the Montparnasse district of Paris) make it possible without any mathematical knowledge to divide surfaces rhythmically. Lacking these compasses, the additive series, named after Fibonacci, can be used, which, as the first numbers are left behind, gives an ever increasingly exact approximation of the relation in question. Here is the series: 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, 89, 144, etc. Each number is the sum of the two preceding ones and at the same time the mean of the two numbers closest to it. It is in a ratio related to the Golden Section with the number which preceded it and the number which follows. To use it you must determine, after the manner of Seurat for the *La Parade*, within the impure rectangle of the commercial frame a rectangle the shorter side of which will be in the desired proportion to the longer.²

The play of the divisions mentioned above in connection with Sérusier's *Porte d'Harmonie* has only to be repeated within this ideal rectangle; the part sacrificed being available for the representation of some secondary element. In Seurat's *La Parade*, this space left over is reserved for the gas footlights. But instead of using stock sizes it seems preferable to have frames made in the required proportions. A frame measuring, for example, 55 cm by 89 cm, or 98 cm by 144 cm, will be suitable for a composition based on the Golden Number. For rough sketches, here is a convenient way of obtaining the Golden Rectangle: draw a square, divide it vertically into two equal parts, draw the diagonal of one of these half-squares, drop this diagonal on to the produced base line and at the point of intersection draw a perpendicular. To divide a line in the same proportions, proceed according to the indications to the figure:—



¹ Made in Germany. It would be interesting to find track of them again.

² Monsieur Monod Herzen tells us (cf. No. 1 of *L'Amour de L'Art*), that the primitive painters made equal use of the following relations: $\frac{1}{\sqrt{2}}$ $\frac{1}{\sqrt{3}}$ $\frac{2}{\pi}$ the latter being equal, to the hundredth part nearly, to the Golden Section, a fact which may account for many mistakes in the interpretations of ancient works of art.

Is it necessary to add that this process, which consists of drawing the cage before inserting the captive forms, has no right to claim pre-eminence? It is especially suitable for certain minds that are singularly balanced and of great generosity, capable once they have conceived their work of introducing into these mental constructions, without killing them, the quivering elements of their own sensation. They are strange beings, capable of rising to the greatest heights. Among them we can number in the past, the Greeks, Luca Pacioli, Brunelleschi, Paolo Uccello, Piero della Francesca, da Vinci, Raphael, Tintoretto, El Greco, etc. But, as we have seen, these heroes belong to privileged periods; modern history shows us mostly artists who raise themselves progressively by a series of efforts from the first sensation to the final sublimation.

The modern painter, with his subject before him, forgetting all his memories of the galleries, becomes the prisoner dazzled by the present moment. A seething spectacle, composed of contradictory elements is before him. Some of the elements are secretly desired by his unconscious but they are so mixed up with their neighbours and even a diagrammatic notation of them is so far behind in relation to the time of perception, that interferences are bound to take place, and those clear flashes, born of the first contact with the model, are going to be dimmed as soon as it is a question of transferring the vibrations on to the canvas.

How is it done, this process of seeing and retaining just these and no others, of remaining blind, with one's eyes still open to the world of appearances, to the hostile spirits? How can one remain faithful to this sudden revelation of truth (one's own truth) that every man walking along encounters at the turn of every footpath? How can one separate, *if one is a colourist*, the rainbow from the sensation of the shadows of chiaroscuro, or conversely, *if one is a painter of values*, distinguish the elements of the drawing: lines, and clear values, grey and dark, parasitic iridescences?

Some painters who are fond of clouds and water, respond rather to vast eddies and whirlwinds carved out by hills, forests, rivers and skies which swirl together like the washing in a laundress's hands, and the shadow of the clouds sweeping the vast countryside, unveils its outlines and most secret mouldings one by one. These visionaries will proceed from the whole to the part. Armed with the spirit of synthesis, they perceive things only from a general viewpoint. They brush in the image of their entire sensation and with real passion search for the dominant lines which are to become the structural lines of their pictures in the labyrinths of the combined forms. The *Nuit Etoilée* of Van Gogh (Plate 64) is a magnificent illustration of this tendency which most of the time impels the artist to adopt a curvilinear pattern of lines, since the curve possesses to a much greater extent than the straight line the property of moulding itself to the impulses and reactions of the unconscious.

These Van Gogh landscapes made of a skein of coloured lines, rhythmically

harmonised and leaping, like a stream over pebbles, all obstacles that bar its way, have exercised a very strong influence on all contemporary painters whose emancipation had begun with Cézanne. The master of Aix had taught them intensity of colour and communicated a yearning for Poussin-like classicism; Van Gogh taught them the evocative power of local tone and restored to their memories the rhythmic writing of the Irish or French illuminators of the 12th century. His lesson was heard because it was not uttered from the height of the pulpit but whispered, like Cézanne's, in the midst of the struggle – Jacob wrestling with the Angel – between the painter and reality. Reality always has the upper hand but the fragment of cloth that you tear from it when your name is Cézanne or Vincent Van Gogh, gleams with unsuspected brilliance.

To speak only of the structure of the picture, Van Gogh tore rhythm, that frozen dance of the natural elements, from the mirage of the fleeting hours. This rhythm builds up the canvas as surely as all the elements of geometry, but to be effective it requires to be deeply experienced, to be lived and registered in fearful haste, in ecstasy sharpened by the fear that it will too soon be exhausted.

Like those conductors who mime a symphony with their hands, their arms and their whole body – seeming to carve out a huge statue visible to themselves alone – the painter, responsive to the hidden rhythm of a landscape, dances with it, brush and pencil in hand, and registers movements which voluptuously interflow. At such moments he must no longer think about what he knows of this landscape: ground, trees, and houses scattered like samples on a counter, but have eyes only for the secret thread that binds them together. The reader will understand that there is no precise method for combining these eloquent mazes. I only know one – that is, to seek purification and excitement before the frescoes of Roman decorators and recapture the state of mind derived from this contemplation as you approach these thousand frescoes mingled together which form the apparently most simple spectacle. Having worked out the balanced movements, the curves and arabesques, the leaps and explosions of forms suddenly unified by this rhythm, an echo of the inner rhythm (instinct must be given free play, not the brain), you will then have the irrational and living framework of the landscape which will be unfolded like a human form stretched out, and the excrescences, the flowing hair, will take their place as if by magic as the artist gives them the required twist of expressive distortion. To-day I emphasise this strange way of composing with sensation alone, because too many young men of my acquaintance believe in the infallibility of geometric measurements, forgetting that nothing is effective unless the heart and body also participate.

Corot, proceeding to this preliminary synthesis, said that he drew out the 'framework' of his picture, a framework which he then supplied with details while endeavouring to sustain its inspired architecture. The old boy knew an often neglected truth; it is that the most extensive landscape too broadly

interpreted shrinks and appears no more important than the smallest corner of nature; it is the multiplicity of details born of the analysis *following on the synthesis* that gives the sensation of immensity. Breughel's landscapes owe their vastness to the effect over great areas of the accumulation of specific details, punctuating the great masses as they unfold and giving them a human scale.

With broad sweeps of the brush, copy the rocky landscape which forms part of the distance in Mantegna's *Saint Sebastian* in the Louvre; you will see it melting away visibly and become a mere pebble: add the arches, doorways, bushes, and immediately, with the human scale provided, it will attain vast proportions. I have been privileged to see, at very close range, and touch the ceiling of, the Sistine Chapel. Considering the distance below separating me from it, I expected to find the figures in the central panels enormous. Well, I was amazed to find them much smaller than I imagined them to be. I was thus able to confirm that this explosion so to speak of each form was the result of the accumulation of details, sufficiently clear, yet, and there lies the difficulty, sufficiently integrated to leave unimpaired the unity of the figure.

We are now far away from the visionaries; the family of the heroes of the *a posteriori* approach embraces other painters of tender short-sightedness, who, revolting against the comprehensive vision and preliminary synthesis, prefer to proceed from the analysis. The clear and motionless drawing of the leaf, the grass and the pebble, is imposed on them fragmentarily, preceding any recapitulation. They proceed from the detail to the whole, which is easier than at first sight appears; since, as morphology teaches us, any detail of a living creature reflects its general form. Albrecht Dürer, who carried out such passionate research on the secret of proportions and the composition of pictures, patiently drew trees, flowers and butterflies which had as much importance in his eyes as a wood or a mountain.

But whether you start from the detail or the whole, there is always the stage when, at the moment of the execution of the large composed landscape, all its elements must be submitted to a predetermined order. In practice, as we have seen, the surface of the canvas must be divided into different zones, harmoniously integrated and *oriented in a definite direction*. How are these orientations to be determined without recourse to mathematical calculation? Merely by retaining only the dominant directions of the scene which the artist will transfer to the sketch, starting from each corner of the picture and without worrying about the points where the objects are to find their position. These directions: branches, folds in the ground, roofs of houses, lines of shadows or bursts of light, will be accumulated in a 'given' direction. He will then try to collect a minimum of complementary movements in the opposite direction in such a way as to arrive at a state of unstable equilibrium, that source of excitement for awakened sensibilities. This was the procedure of Cézanne whose *Château Noir* (Plate 35) shows the basis drawing very clearly under the multiplicity of touches.

The little game of the Japanese we considered in the chapter on Drawing, obliging the beginner to feel nature through forms having a *unity of structure*, forced him at the same time to understand the disposition of forms only through a simply rhythmic network.

The photographs of Cézanne subjects taken by Mr John Rewald which figured at the Cézanne Retrospective Exhibition at the *Galerie des Indépendants* of 1939, compared with the pictures of the Master of Aix, showed with what meticulous care the painter reduced the directions suited for each object to two or three essential directions on which these objects were brought into a proper relationship. An *average* was provided for him by the combination of the directions; nature offered to the painter then a true drawing which became ideal only through his systematic repetition. Instead of being forcibly enclosed in lines having only a very remote connection with it, nature interrogated by Cézanne became a victim of its own snares. Cézanne had only to alter slightly the angle of a rock and incline a tree trunk a little more to obtain the necessary parallelism. Sometimes it only requires a slight push of the thumb and the picture is composed. '*To do Poussin over again from Nature*' means neither more nor less than that.

Thus it matters little whether you start from an *a priori* discipline, acquired or intended, or a discipline subjected to and revealed by sensation. It is a question of temperament. The main thing is that dispersed elements should be linked up by common orientations and meet in accordance with a system of directions split up over the whole surface.

When Delacroix wrote 'There are no parallel lines in Nature' or 'Straight lines are monsters', he was expressing not a truth but a particular view on nature, valid for his personal experiences and, because of its partial and individual character, lacking universal application.¹ It can be very clearly seen that this aphorism collapses on an analysis of any fresco at Pompeii or of Giotto or Piero della Francesca, etc. When he says on the other hand, 'Genius is the art of co-ordinating relationships', he is pronouncing an eternal Law, valid for all time, illustrated by all the masters, from the baroque to the classical school.

¹ Delacroix thought in curves, as did Van Gogh at the end of his life.

Pictorial Technique

Question a picture restorer: he will tell you that the number of modern canvases in need of urgent attention is infinitely in excess of that of old canvases, and that this ratio increases every day. He will tell you similarly that most of the damage suffered by modern painting is irreparable. This is due to the decadence of the painting profession which goes back a long way. As long ago as 1636, Van Dyck, thanking M. François Junius for his book *De Pictura Veterum*, expressed himself in these words, 'I am certain that the public will welcome it and that art will gain thereby because your work will impart a more perfect knowledge of it. If the work is able to revive art *at a time when it is almost lost*, the author cannot but gain thereby much glory and much satisfaction.' Is there any need to add that this decadence is more pronounced every day? Few artists are concerned with the fate of their work; this contempt for the craft is a corollary to the painter's contempt for any preliminary deliberation on his own part. Since the only thing that matters is the most immediate enjoyment possible, all preliminary precautions, as much spiritual as material, must be put on one side. Now the craft of painting demands great patience and implies the virtue of deliberation which is the mark of great technicians; the transition from conception to execution presupposes a whole series of complicated operations, whatever be the method chosen.

The surest way would be to paint 'premier coup' without any retouching, as one does in a sketch. A sketch compared with the picture is always fresher because it is free from fumbling and repainting. Indeed, overpainting inevitably gives rise to *repentirs*¹ and cracks. The former is the name we give to the appearance through the final layer of the underpainting when it is of a deeper colour; cracks and wrinkles are splits in the top layer, often retracting more quickly than those it covers up. Further, mixtures of colour, simple in a sketch, often become complicated in the execution of the picture; hence unfortunate chemical reactions. In this connection we must refer back to Rubens, who mixes his colours as little as possible, and whose greys were basically black and white, sometimes slightly tinted with one single colour. Modern greys, on the contrary, since the days of impressionism have been produced by complicated mixtures, impossible to supervise from the chemical point of view. These greys, sometimes of an unexpected delicacy, are certainly extremely 'enchanted' and indicate a good deal of 'taste'. But we begin to smile if these epithets are applied to an Old Master. Would it occur to anyone to wonder whether Michelangelo or Rembrandt or Rubens had taste? They had plenty of other things to do than cultivate this virtue of the feeble.

¹ The paint, with the passage of time, becomes transparent like a mirror revealing what has been painted underneath. A.L.

Reduction of the number of opaque layers, reduction of colour mixtures, such appears to be the remedy for the evils that modern painting suffers from. To give this simple craft its full efficacy, it is further necessary to work on a very dry canvas, that is, exposed to the air for at least a year, and slightly cleaned with alcohol or acetone when you begin painting, since the oil in this preparation deposits on the surface a thin, greasy film which prevents the painting from adhering. I am referring here to a danger which affects only canvases of exceptional quality such are as no longer to be found since the war,¹ for unfortunately the traditional preparation of gum arabic and flake white has been replaced by a disastrous mixture of glycerine, chalk and zinc white.

'Premier coup' painting, we said: It remains to be seen whether there is an artist living capable of executing in this way a picture worthy of the name. Ingres was one of the last masters who had the skill to pull it off, but in his case everything was worked out beforehand; he knew exactly where he was going and, his research being of the plastic rather than the chromatic order, almost the whole problem could be elucidated with the help of preliminary drawings (and they were legion). The only procedure capable of allowing the modern to execute his canvas 'premier coup' would be for him to work out in as much detail as possible the final structure of his picture on a sheet of paper of the same dimensions so that he would only have to copy it, starting from one point and working systematically to the opposite point. If he made a mistake, the slight layer of painting would be removed with a rag dipped in spirit of turpentine. It would be in short making what fresco painters or tapestry weavers call 'cartoons'. The pictures that Renoir executed towards the end of his life which were done in this way are entirely different from those he painted up to about 1890. He noticed in fact at this period that his early works were cracking and the pictures deteriorating. He watched his colour mixtures which, like Rubens, he reduced to the minimum, and was satisfied with a thin single layer. His experience enabled him to dispense with cartoons; his picture was virtually carried out in his head. A certain public, for reasons I shall call culinary, prefers his early pictures to the final ones. Future generations, in whose eyes the later ones will appear much fresher than the earlier, will feel differently.

If Cézanne's canvases have slightly deteriorated in some cases from the point of view of colour (detrimental effects of emerald green, Prussian blue and carmine lake) they are almost always very well preserved from the point of view of material substance. That is because of the thinness of layers, the methodic way he paints one on top of the other, and their weak oil content. Rich in oil, they would have inevitably turned black or yellow and would have cracked. In a general way, if for reasons of pigmentation you desire to paint thick and in layers,

¹ That is (in the first edition) the 1914 War. Is there any need to add that the 1939 War almost saw, in France, the complete disappearance of primed canvases?

you will have to see that the first layers are very siccative and fluid and the succeeding ones progressively less siccative, and slightly richer in oil. That is the method adopted by house painters: you never see a door, even a door exposed to the inclemency of the weather, offer the sad appearance of some modern pictures.

Another technique, which implies equally a preliminary cartoon, is that of glazing. As we know, the glaze is a transparent layer of colour diluted with oil, and brushed over very clear underpaintings. Its effects are wonderful and extremely permanent: the transparent reds and yellows of Rubens and El Greco are obtained in that way. Some colours such as Cassel earth and rose madder can only be used in glazes; mixed with white they turn pale as the years go by until they fade out altogether. Some Impressionist pinks thus obtained have already done so.

After studying the rational methods of painting, we can get an idea of the precautions necessary for the retouching of a picture insufficiently prepared. Before retouching a canvas you must make sure that the underpaintings are sufficiently dry. If this is not the case, you have to scrape them right down to the canvas, but if you are resolved to get the full value out of the layers, you must diminish the degree of siccativity of the final layer by adding to the medium two or three drops of spirit of cloves. This spirit has the property of considerably delaying the drying of the colour. Thus, the layer underneath will have time to do its work under the one covering it which will remain inactive for a long time (a fortnight to a month according to the strength). In this case, the picture should, of course, be kept protected from dust.

In a general way colours with an iron-oxide basis (the earth colours), cobalt and emerald green, are extremely siccative. The purer they are employed, the more cracks they cause, especially if the underlayers contain a lot of white. It is thus seen that painting dark on light is as dangerous as painting light on dark. This leads us to the second recipe: avoid over-dark underpainting. Actually, whatever be the thickness of the final layer, the lower layer, if it is darker, will eventually show through. You now see that it is almost impossible to keep watch on the different reactions produced by successive layers. In general, the more a picture is retouched, the more it is bound to suffer. You must therefore be distrustful of the over-flattering appearance, those juicy stews so beloved by the devotees of short-lived pictorial decomposition. Their substance is doomed to destruction and unless the picture is resold in time in accordance with the depressing custom of modern speculators, the collector's sons run the risk of not getting as much pleasure out of the work as their father . . .

What is to be done then if at all costs you wish to obtain a durable result? Rough out the design on the canvas in grey monochrome or different greys and colour them with the help of glazes or semi-opaque scumbles. It was Titian's method and his colour is admirable, but I doubt whether many moderns have

the patience to forget their work so long or, if they do, resume it with increased affection. They can find consolation by reminding themselves that a work like Paolo Uccello's *Battle* in the National Gallery, London (the only one of the triptych which is in its primitive state), which was painted in flat tints, attains, as much through the power of the mind as by the knowledge of ornamental combinations, a beauty such as few 'doctored' canvases can claim.

I have spoken of painting on paper. You have no idea of the number of works even of considerable size which have been painted in this way in the course of the centuries. A famous Italian of the 18th century, R. P. Sebastian Resta wrote: 'Correggio made several preliminary sketches, colouring them straight away on paper or canvas and then he sought to get more correctness in the drawing. I once owned the first sketch of the Christ alone, vigorously painted on paper'. He wrote similarly to M. J. Pierre Bellori: 'Louis XII, King of France, asked Leonardo da Vinci before the year 1500 for a cartoon of Saint Anne . . . After this sketch he made the second, more finished one . . . which is well-preserved, as you can see, although it is almost two hundred years old . . . Leonardo . . . made a third, still more finished one that he based on the latter and sent it to Francis I in 1515'. So it was not one, but two, three and even more sketches that masters of Da Vinci's calibre made before the final picture. Let us take a leaf from his book.

When stuck on to a canvas or a panel with casein, paper offers an excellent support. Rouault has never painted in any other way. The paint must be spread very vigorously in very thin layers diluted in refined mineral spirits, as oil burns the paper.

In the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* of September 1933, M. Van den Bergh, painter and restorer, explains that the marvellous state of Rubens' *Virgin with Cherubim* in the Louvre is the result of its being painted on paper (the traces of backing are apparent in the corners of the picture). Van Dyck's *Charles I* is painted on six widths of paper which overlap each other.

This short treatise would be incomplete if the question of the medium were not touched on. Spirit of turpentine refined and very fresh, as employed by Cézanne, seems to constitute a pretty successful medium. At one stage in his career, he added Haarlem siccative which gave more body to the colour and accelerated the drying process. But this siccative which formerly had an oil basis rendered viscous through long exposure to the air, is prepared nowadays with oil that has been boiled, that is, deprived of its principal properties. Pure linseed oil, used in excess, is the enemy of painting (most tube colours contain too much). Watteau often overdid it: pictures painted in this way have blackened and cracked. It is a good practice to dilute turpentine – conforming to the house painter's recipes. Poppy oil used sparingly is excellent. Finally, for works carried out without too much retouching, emulsions of the 'Maroger' kind (water, gum, oil of lavender, varnish plus a siccative substance) give unrivalled body which recalls that of old

masters. But it is difficult to work over that substance which attains at the first painting a supreme degree of richness and transparency. For that, too, a very carefully supervised preparation is required.

Colours

Certain very dangerous colours can be very durable if used in their pure state or mixed with zinc white: Naples yellow (best quality), Prussian blue, vermilion (only *Blockx* and *Lefebvre-Foinet* grind Chinese vermilion), emerald green. It is very depressing to note that almost all the Impressionists have employed extremely bad colours, a carelessness that goes back to Delacroix with the deplorable effects we can now see. Here is the list of colours which can be safely used:

Ivory black, peach black, vine black.

Light and deep ultramarine, cobalt blue, light and deep, cerulean blue.

Emerald oxide of chromium (Veridian), light and deep cadmium green, chrome green, *Blockx* composed-greens.

Mars yellow, yellow ochre, light and deep cadmium yellow, *Blockx* or *Lefebvre-Foinet's* lemon yellow.

Burnt sienna, red ochre, Venetian red, Mars brown, Mars red, Indian red.

Light and deep rose madder, alizarin lakes and the whole range of 'Linel'

Persian reds, cadmium red (*Lefebvre-Foinet*, *Blockx*).

Italian earth, brown ochre, raw umber, *Blockx* transparent brown.

Cadmium yellow orange (*Lefebvre-Foinet* or *Blockx*), Mars orange, light and deep cobalt violet, Mars violet.

Unfortunately there exists no ideal white: flake white, which is a very good covering colour, turns black and cannot be mixed with colours containing sulphur oxides. Zinc white, very stable, can be mixed with any colour, but used thickly it vitrifies rapidly, cracks at the slightest jolt and scales off. Permanent white, or a mixture of both, has the advantages and disadvantages of each one separately. It is best to sketch out with a body of flake white and end with a very thin layer of zinc white. *Blockx* and *Lefebvre-Foinet* manufacture an extremely purified flake white which is admirably permanent. It is expensive enough, according to the admission of L. B. Alberti and Cézanne, who considered that painters used it too much.

This account is bound to be incomplete; and is not this whole work riddled with gaps? But I had to prepare it in great haste, and later if I have the time, I will come back to all these matters.

I will wind up with some urgent advice: do not paint on freshly-prepared canvases (unless they have a foundation of size and zinc white or, in the case of a panel, it has been sized by rubbing with a clove of garlic); paint only on best quality pasteboard, those used habitually in commerce contain numerous

particles of carbon which, in contact with the oil, produce brown stains which seep through the biggest thicknesses and which, like bitumen, continue to spread.

Mix, where possible, only colours of identical composition (the iron oxide family will suffice in most cases). It is unwise to mix the cadmiums and ultramarine, cobalt violet with the iron oxides, and in general, all the colours containing sulphur with flake white. I have stated that vermilion and emerald green, used pure, were permanent; I should add that these colours, which deteriorate when in contact with sulphurous fumes of town air, should be isolated by means of a layer of varnish. Select a spirit varnish which, should it darken, can be removed with alcohol. Wait at least a year before varnishing and use Vibert picture varnish, the best. Only Vibert's retouching varnish, and in thin layers, may be used as immediately as possible to revive sunken colour, those areas of deadness which disrupt paintings. But sunken colour can be revived in another way and when the paint is hardly dry: spread lightly with the aid of a water-colour brush a mixture of equal parts poppy oil and water and, after vigorously shaking the mixture, you leave the water to evaporate. In a general way, flake white mixed with colour gives it solidity. If you want to obtain a strong saturation, a praiseworthy aim, you can reinforce the tones with glazes of the same colour. Example: a Venetian red glazed over an underpainting of Venetian red mixed with white. It should be noted that the tone thus obtained is more intense than that given by an impasto of pure colour. You see then that the technique of prepared boards effects considerable economies . . .

If you prepare your canvas yourself, choose linen or hemp canvas, never cotton. *Blockx* advocates the preparation without size with silver white (carbonate of lead) ground with oil, spread with a palette knife in a thin layer, the canvas being first wetted.

It is as well to know that all cheap colours are impure: insufficiently washed powders containing dangerous substances (light cadmiums contain free sulphur) powders adulterated or tinted with analine. Some blues and greens have a Prussian blue foundation. Most manufacturers add wax (and even tallow) to the oil which is used for grinding. All this is the sort of thing done by dishonest manufacturers who spoil their products by mechanical grinding; only hand grinding is slow enough not to heat up the oil; the machine with over-rapid friction heats it and removes its chief qualities.

For drawings and water-colours, buy only pure rag papers, air and not oven-dried. *Whatman* and *Johnston* are well known in England; in France, *Montval* papers; *Rives* manufactures for one of the oldest firms in Montparnasse noted for its hand-ground colours, a magnificent yet cheap paper (make sure, by holding it up to the light, that it bears the watermark of three flax flowers which, according to a recent convention, guarantee the absolute purity of the paper — two flax flowers indicate about 20 per cent wood pulp).

To end in full diapason, I cannot do better than quote this passage from a letter of a master for whom my veneration is well known. It shows us that fresh painting (it remains so for a year at least) must not be left in a dark place; that sunlight bleaches oil, and above all that over-esteem of oneself is the vice of petty natures:

'I am afraid that a freshly-painted canvas remaining so long sized and encased will deteriorate somewhat, particularly in the flesh tints, and that the lakes will turn yellow; but knowing that V.S. is a man very skilled in our craft, this can easily be remedied by exposing the picture to the sun and leaving it thus at intervals.

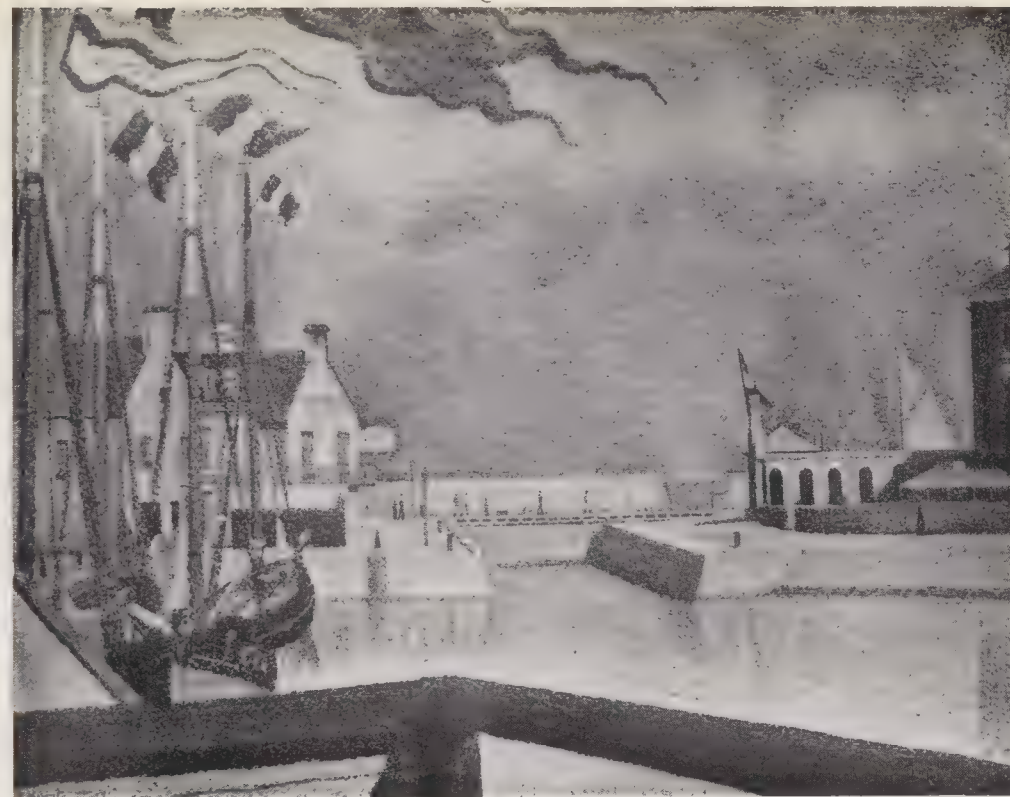
'V.S. has certainly my permission to put his hand to it and retouch it where necessary, if by some misfortune or my stupidity such need should arise. I kiss your hands. — PETER PAUL RUBENS'.

PLATES



3. DUTCH SCHOOL, 17th Century. Fragment of a landscape

You can see in this simple fragment which reflects the whole picture, the rhythm of which it helps to reconstitute, the parallelism of complementary directions which I discuss on page p 42. The drawbridge is parallel to the yardarm of the ship which faces it. In the opposite direction, the yardarms of the ships in the distance on the left are strictly parallel. Near the background on the right a sombre beam echoes the same direction.



4. SEURAT. A Sunday at Port-en-Bessin

To find an adequate explanation (after first feeling it) of the beauty of these landscapes, remember that the great enemy of plastic design is repetition. You must 'hark back' to certain forms, certain orientations, tones, ornaments, but at a suitable distance away so that the eye, to some extent wearied by diversity, may find pleasure in rediscovering an element which it has already distinguished. Between the element taken for subject and its equivalent, different elements should occur. For if the eye likes to rediscover a sensation, it also dislikes symmetry. No repetitions too close, but no forms too isolated either. The celebrated 'unity in diversity' results at once from analogies that escape monotony and dissonances subtly linked up to the whole.

Here again, no trace of repetition. All figures of geometry are exploited; when they are repeated, it is never on the same scale. Compare, from the point of view of thought-content those vibrating yet pure forms with the clumsy, top heavy, insufficiently differentiated forms to be met with in a similar subject painted by a Ziem and you will appreciate the effort achieved by the real artist to escape the temptation 'to thin out' which lies in wait for every painter subjected to the dangerous allurements of atmosphere, that devourer of angles and 'articulations'.



5. GIOVANNI BELLINI. Allegory of Purgatory. Detail
Uffizi, Florence

Giovanni Bellini was one of the greatest landscape painters of the *quattrocento*, the first who tried to animate the admirable but dry constructions of Mantegna by the use of atmosphere. His landscapes are as much mental constructions as accumulation of view-points. He is by no means a slave of his own field of vision for setting up those grandiose pieces of architecture worthy of the moving scenes which unfold in them.



6. COROT. The Tower of Philippe-le-bel at Villeneuve-lès-Avignon
The Louvre, Paris

The majority of Corot's pictures, compared with compositions of Old Masters taking place against a piece of landscape, could be contained several times over in backgrounds of the latter of which they seem to be only fragments. The miracle was his discovery of the greatness, the monumental quality of the Old Masters, so naturally and without apparent effort. Another miracle was that he painted simply and obtained a wonderful quality of paint.

It is none the less true that Corot's example remains dangerous: a miracle is not a source of examples. The painters who restrict the field of their visual and intellectual investigation, urging the pretext that Corot painted modest subjects, forget that, in a general way, you cannot attain to full expression except by trying to excel yourself. Corot tried to paint Poussin before resigning himself to painting Corot.



7. GIOVANNI BELLINI. Christ in the Garden of Olives. Detail

National Gallery, London

Despite its fine pictorial substance, Bellini harks back to the fresco from which the easel-picture derives. The plastic elements composing his landscape are reduced to pure symbol, whereas in Corot they are diluted in some parts of the canvas by atmosphere.



8. COROT. Volterra

The Louvre, Paris

Corot, a small-scale painter, attains real greatness which results from proportions. Quality supplements quantity. It is, since the period of the illuminators, an exclusively Franco-Flemish phenomenon. It is difficult, however, to realise this monumental quality, brought about by dimensional relationships on a large scale. Now, the collectivity with which we need to become more and more preoccupied, demands vast surfaces. This new necessity raises among other problems that of freshness, safeguarded by work.

The value of deliberation rediscovered? The human through the decorative? That probably is the task which remains to be accomplished. The moderns, singularly fortunate, will have to win forgiveness for their inherited wealth by the use they make of it.



9. BREUGHEL THE ELDER. The Ascent to Calvary. Detail

Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

It is possible to take a stroll round on this extraordinary picture (but on what picture of Breughel's is it not?); a 'hidden treasure' whatever the size, *it will always appear composed*. This is because each element is arranged in such a way that it constitutes with the neighbouring element an indissoluble whole, thanks to a compensatory system of angles (right-angle, acute, obtuse) of curves (more or less open or closed) and dimensions that are never similar. Nothing more ordered than this apparent diffusion; nothing more unexpected to analyse; nothing so inexhaustible. But this wonderful skill is hidden behind simplicity; it is not aggressive like that of the great tenors of the decorative in the Botticelli tradition. The public does not pay attention to hidden strength. Cézanne, after Breughel, did not fail to notice it.



10. PATINIR. Repose of the Holy Family. Detail

Prado, Madrid

Not as subtle as Breughel, Patinir remains with Giovanni Bellini, one of the greatest landscape painters of all time. He introduces more sympathy than the Italian in his representations which are furthermore just as heroic. What more touching than these pastoral scenes, what more true to life?



13. PATINIR. Paradise and Hell

Prado, Madrid

The inharmonious *Saint Jerome* of the Louvre, the sky of which has certainly been repainted (unless the picture is a copy) gives no idea of the skill of Patinir whose variety will be apparent from the selection here given. He has succeeded in transforming pure landscape into eloquent landscape. The people who stand here and there as landmarks are only an insignificant concession to anecdote.



14. BONNARD. The Seine at Vernon

The splitting up of the light into colours (tints) tends to destroy the expressive calligraphy of tradition. Bonnard, who is an admirable colourist, steeping all the objects in iridescent mists, makes a supreme contribution to Impressionism. After him, a restoration of the architecture of the picture is inevitable but accompanied, of course, by attempts to animate it with coloured modulations.



15. ANDRÉ LHOTE. Gas

Palace of Discovery, Paris (right-hand panel of the decoration, Chemistry Section)

A modern landscape. Why always the corner of the river and the reflection in the water? There are veritable metallic landscapes, man-created. Pylons, gasometers and reservoirs offer as much variety in their combinations as natural elements do. Men who work or rest are as moving as ploughmen in a field. The 'labour of men' of to-day which awaits its Virgil, should not have to wait too long for its painters.



16. MARCEL GROMAIRE. The Forest (1937)

The problem was to cover the canvas from top to bottom with the help of plastic elements taken from reality, assembled together without any concern about the tyrant 'perspective'. A picture conceived in this way will escape the decorative in so far as the different parts of the composition are animated by modulations of atmosphere.



17. MANTEGNA. Christ in the Garden of Olives. Detail

Museum of Tours

The painter's careful avoidance of repetition, impasto and dilution, those wounds of painting, will be noticed. Every object is reduced to a pure symbol extremely particularised and offering (with its neighbour) the greatest contrast. The differentiation will operate as much between objects (the round cloud, the spurting branches, the serrated leaves) as between surfaces: there are not two alike in form or dimension. The 'echoes' required for the connecting-up of the masses operate by the aid of equivalent elements but of a different nature: these palaces, houses, this fence or that strange, arbitrary construction in the form of a beehive at the top of the steps . . .

The pure atmosphere of the landscape painters is not yet attained, however; it was Van Eyck who was to bring about the conquest without renouncing the plasticity of the smallest details.



18. BREUGHEL THE ELDER. Temptation of St. Anthony

Collection Robert Franck, London

Breughel remains as plastic as Mantegna or Bellini, while practising localisation of atmospheric tones and generalisations of passages; hence his amazing modernity.



19. LUCAS CRANACH THE ELDER. Nymph recumbent in a landscape

Leipzig Museum

To isolate the landscape from the figure in this case would have been treachery to the intention—admitted or not—of the painter who finds the same parallelogram constituted by the top part of the figure (from the shoulders to the right thigh) repeated in the fountain. This 'echo' illustrates in a way quite different from Mantegna's, the theory of *plastic rhymes*, another application of which is to be found in the drawing of the mountains on the right which carry on the rhythm of the raised right leg and even the pattern of the separated toes.

Fools are surprised at the strange perspective offered by the fountain: the bowl seen from above, the capital from below. There would indeed be two viewpoints there if the artist had deigned to take into account the mechanics of vision codified by the Italians, but the problem which interested him particularly (and which interests the modern no less) is this strictly plastic problem of the combination of a parallelogram and the curves of the jet of water. The curves of the capital recall those of the pine tree facing it. Furthermore, the statue placed on the capital would not have benefited by this happy supporting pedestal if its support had been submitted to the same perspective as the bowl. All these liberties are not the result of an intellectual effort but of purely sensory experiments tending to organise analogies.



20. HENRI ROUSSEAU. Summer

Rousseau rediscovers Franco-Flemish amiability with ingenuousness along with the precise drawing of details and the reduction of the scene to simple planes. Devotees of aesthetic informality refuse to admit that forms should be *written*; they would have continued to disregard Rousseau if speculation, that new miracle-working god, had not belatedly opened their eyes; how many Tobias there are touched by a finger of gold among modern collectors!



21. RUBENS. Landscape with rainbow

Alte Pinakothek, Munich

It is interesting to find some of Breughel's themes in Rubens: these three young women, this horseman. Whereas Breughel mixed his elements, connecting them only with the help of occasional blurrings and numerous similarities of colour, Rubens links them up with the help of a writhing composition, the curves of which repose on certain points of the objects or on ideal points bounding the zones of light. In *Spring* the composition in curves is not blinding because of the rainbow which attracts all the attention; it is more so in *Philemon and Baucis* which will be found reproduced later.



22. BREUGHEL THE ELDER. The Hayharvest

Collection of Prince Lobkowitz, Raudnitz

Delacroix who might well have been content to allow his genius to find spontaneous expression, went to a great deal of trouble to co-ordinate its plastic manifestations. 'Genius is the art of co-ordinating relationships', he said. But, once again, the painter Breughel is one of those who possessed to the fullest extent the art of organising the greatest number of elements by always offering to the eye a simple ensemble. His secret lies less in the adoption of dominant directions than in the choice of a very reduced colour harmony, made mostly of warm tones, emanating from one and the same principle; red, orange, and equally close cold tones: green, cold blue sparingly applied to a neutral ground, habitually of a golden grey. He was equally economical in his contrasts. One is amazed to see whole series of figures mixed together and as it were woven into the backgrounds. They seem, however, to stand out against them by the magic of those very light accents with which he enlivens them. A bonnet *lighter than in reality* appears to push forward a figure which moreover penetrates the setting *more than it would in real life*. The two primordial phenomena of the 'passage' and contrast are enormously exaggerated, but the former on a much bigger scale than the latter, to cancel out the tendency to diffusion given by the multiplicity of planes and ornaments resulting from the innumerable host of figures and objects. Thus one becomes conscious of an essential rule of composition: the more elements a picture contains, the more concessions should be made by them. A composition, imperfect even from the architectural point of view, can be saved by the adoption of this principle. It is essential to add that, whatever be the care lavished on the repartition of the plastic elements, everything depends on the pictorial subject matter, otherwise the picture is only a fine drawing or bas-relief.



25. CUYP. Landscape with horsemen and flocks of sheep

Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

It is not only notions of space and depth which the art of landscape makes so difficult and complicated: the lack of homogeneity in the elements composing it must also be observed, an empty sky or a stretch of waste ground on one side; on the other excessively small details: bushes, stones, people, animals. A nude, a portrait, a human spectacle on the other hand with their planes of the *same kind* which they offer to the light, facilitate the general modelling and operate in favour of the necessary unity. Everything in the human body right down to wrinkles is to scale; even the hair is grouped in curls or locks. And what about still-life where the folds of cloth are moulded to the outline of the objects which, created to human scale, necessarily offer a structural relationship?

The essential difficulty for the landscape painter is to obtain unity while maintaining the real relationships between dissimilar elements. Cuyp, like all the Dutch painters of the 17th century, succeeded by his use of chiaroscuro which submerges objects of no outstanding interest under waves of shadow light or half-tint or which conversely breaks up overlarge objects by partially covering them. By this device, the sheep, stones, grass, all the small incidents are merged into the vast spaces of ground. The whole landscape is modelled like a human body, for man remains the prototype of artistic creation.

If you compare one of the wonderful Tanagra or Myrina statuettes (excellently reproduced in volume 2 of the *Encyclopédie Photographique, Edition Tel*) with this landscape, the background of which is unfortunately much too pale in the reproduction for its modelling to be visible, you can see a similarity of appearance extremely exciting for the mind, and understand the value of the miraculous feat of the great landscape painters of the northern school. See the chapter on Light.



26. PATINIR. St Jerome

Prado, Madrid

See the chapters on Screens (p. 13) and Passages (p. 16).



27. GIOVANNI BELLINI. Saint Francis. Detail

Civic Museum, Pesaro

Bellini has borrowed considerably from Mantegna, but he has given much to Titian. You can take from the community on condition you pay back with interest. These backgrounds of landscape where human constructions are balanced with natural architecture are full of grandeur and serenity.



28. CANALETTO. Venice

National Gallery, London

This Canaletto is restful after the somewhat theatrical representations of Venice and her monumental pomp. Its severity is softened, thanks to the chiaroscuro.

The chiaroscuro is the first element of disturbance introduced into the representation of the spectacle. The 'passage' makes its appearance. The objects lose their individuality; they melt into the whole, they merge into each other, thus creating a real movement. The eye glides over these slopes and relentlessly over the surface, attracted from the darkest to the clearest part; it no longer rests on the object; it no longer considers the details one after the other but the whole together.

The objects, however, remain written, indicated; the expressive hieroglyph is eroded only on its least revealing side.

As with the illuminators and fresco-painters, the elements are still mixed; the wall, absent, is still respected. Depth is only suggested. The rhythm of the composition is almost always rectilinear as in the preceding centuries.

The modelling is an ornament in thickness but it remains ornament. The local tone loses in intensity and individuality what it gains in modelling: it is literally *gradated*.



29. CÉZANNE. The Bridge

The problem of atmosphere of and the architectural transposition of the scene, was brilliantly solved by Cézanne. The mechanics by which the solid and the vaporous, the contrast and the passage, balance and compensate each other, assumes considerable importance and results in a restricted orchestration in which the melodic line of the object becomes more and more discreet.

The feats of the old masters whose devices were hidden, become here transparent, the painter declares his intentions. Italian perspective gives way to sensory perspective which takes no account of the vanishing point, and which sometimes gives the distant object more importance than one in the foreground.



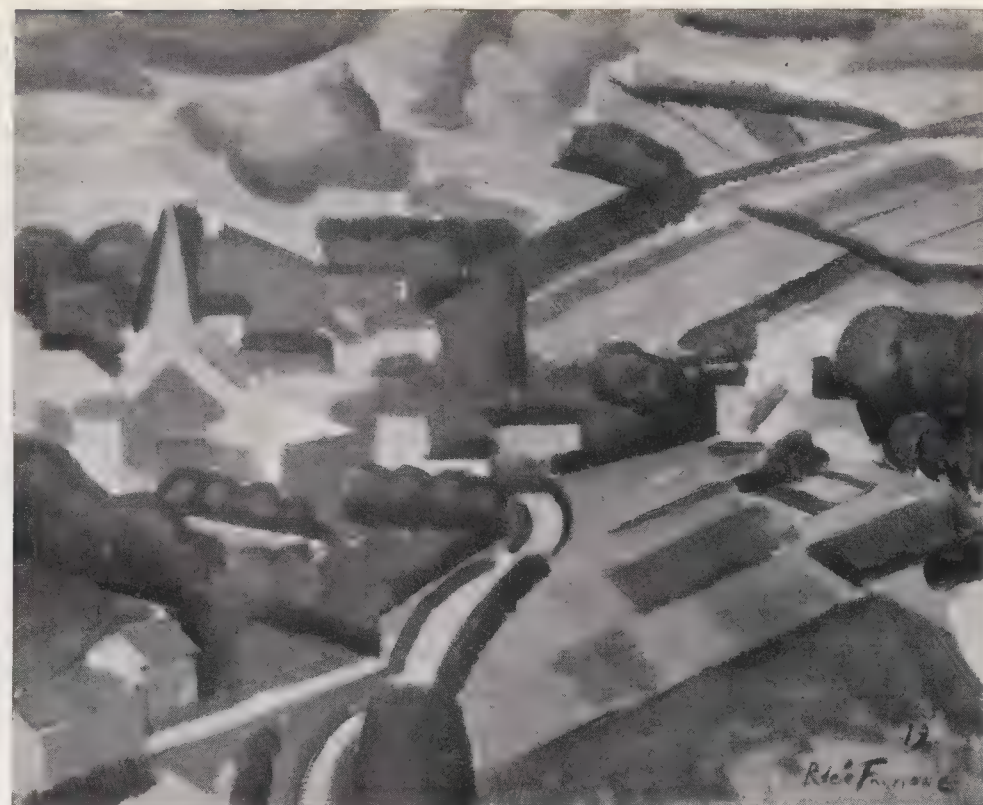
30. PICASSO. Landscape (Horta de Ebro)

Cézanne's teaching was heeded by the Cubists who experienced a great intoxication in undertaking, with the help of personal means, the traditional conquest of geometrised planes, spatial construction and in making evident the means employed. With the 'Philipart' concern about 'local colour' finally rejected, the whole problem was placed on the plastic plane; it was above all a matter of transforming the objects or rather the phenomena of which they are the theatre, into specifically pictorial elements.



31. JACQUES VILLON. Olive and Orange Trees

In the drawings and paintings of this early Cubist there is a touch of the unreality of Da Vinci's intellectual constructions. Along with Bonnard and Utrillo, Villon is the only great modern landscape painter in the sense in which that term is used in this book. But the public is not interested in the problem of the composed landscape. It is therefore perturbed by the kind of mysticism required for the building up of a quasi-metaphysical setting. Its enjoyment is of the material rather than the spiritual order. This explains the difficulty, shared by Rouault, which this painter had in establishing his position. As ever, when it is a matter of the great, the miracle is due only to speculation. The only popular talisman is money.



32. ROGER DE LA FRESNAYE. Landscape

The French Cubists, heirs of the Impressionists, never forgot the fact that the search for the geometrised expression of landscape elements should never be executed to the detriment of the atmospheric passages. The 'passage' gives suppleness to the whole and emphasises the solidity of the elements which it leaves untouched. The distortion of a form, even its partial effacement – if clearly effected – become elements of the picture. De La Fresnaye died too soon to exploit fully his discoveries.



33. ANDRÉ LHOTE. Venice (1937)

Organic growth is manifested in two very distinct ways, vertically in rhythmic progressions, or in a spiral. Learned research has been carried out on the 'Law of harmonious growth in plants'. M. Matila Ghyka, author of one of such studies, has proved that these pulsations and the visible traces they leave in the structure of the plant are often submitted to the law of the Golden Number.

To keep to the plastic appearance of these natural manifestations, we can group them in two quite distinct categories: the first of static character, requiring for its representation the dominance of the right angle (it is the classical rhythm), the second of dynamic character, implying the dominance of the curve and construction in depth: the baroque rhythm.

The reproductions have been grouped (in so far as particular juxtapositions allowed) according to this fundamental distinction. It is understood that two artistic conceptions, characterised by the predominance of the straight line or the curve can, according to the case in point, suit the same temperament. The majority of the great artists have adopted them successively all through their career following the exigences of their sensibilities or those of the particular subject treated; of the modern, one may add, according to the impression received.



34. ANDRÉ LHOTE. Marseilles seen from the Place Saint Victor (1936)

To quote only one example: Rubens, desirous of expressing the calm and serenity of his existence, paints himself in company with his wife in his garden, in the midst of an ascent of vertical lines, but when he had to paint battles or storms, he submitted the whole composition to a system of spirals, the unfolding of which over the surface and in depth can be reduced to the diagram of acanthus leaves and tendrils reproduced above.



35. CÉZANNE. Le Château Noir

The subtle displacement on opposed movements of a simple geometric figure within the rectilinear framework provided Cézanne with the constructive directions of the landscape. The 'passages' done from nature take it upon themselves to soften the play of rectilinear elements. In baroque painters you find these diagonal adjustments of straight lines replaced by convolutions of curves. Cranach's parallelogram recurs in this Cézanne, very conspicuous in the centre with the tree trunk on the right and the first on the left, the latter repeated in the lower part by a trunk section from which springs an interrupted branch and this, through the parallelogram it forms with the upper branches of the straight tree, determines the figure. With a little observation you will find this parallelogram displaced in the opposite direction, and more subtly still, in depth. One is both soothed and tormented by these movements which construct an imaginary space.



36. RUBENS. Landscape - Sunset

National Gallery, London

With Rubens opens the era of the baroque landscape in which movement is introduced not only with the aid of a very extended chiaroscuro, but by the real stir of masses of humanity and vegetation and by lines of composition established on the curve and the spiral, instead of stretched over diagonals and the right angle. We no longer have the hierarchised enumeration of the Primitives, but a real microcosm in which all the elements are mingled. This summary of the universe is endowed with gravitation. It is like the great primitive trituration, the elements of which have hardly cooled down, round an ideal centre.

Impressionism, upsetting the conventional arrangements of the School (Horace Vernet, Hubert Robert, Valenciennes, etc.) undertook the discovery of the world afresh. Dynamic composition is realised in direct contact with the object; it is necessarily reduced, the objective is less vast than that of Rubens, but it is of a kindred spirit. The most tranquil landscape of this master is purposely chosen here; it vibrates in every part, despite the horizontals which bisect it twice. Two oblique lines of ground supported by that of the right-hand side trees accompany the ascent of the clouds.



37. GEORGES BRAQUE. The Town on the Hill

It is curious to note that every movement in art is subject to an identical evolution. Cubism, which is in origin a direct art inspired by the external scene, effects a motionless crystallisation of the parts, then, gradually, it becomes animated to the point of ending in disintegration, the splitting-up of forms, their explosion.

The effort of the Impressionists, Rubens' successors, to recreate the mechanism of vision, gives rise with the Cubists to a moving cataclysm. All sincere vision produces an imaginary-disaster.



38. CÉZANNE. In the Park of the Château Noir. Collection of Dr Soubies, Paris

A picture can be taken to its maximum of colour intensity provided the harmony chosen is extremely reduced. If you want to employ a colour in a pure state, see that the other colours are diminished as much as possible; if you opt for tones of equal strength, see that they are of coolness and warmth which, strengthening each other, appear pure by contrast. They should have been previously modified in that proportion which will intensify their opposition. And all the other tones should be effaced; they should not be present and active but suggested by the play of complementary discharges.

Multiplied modulations amplify the scale of the objects in the same way as details, differentiated and sufficiently isolated from each other, amplify the scale of a drawn or modelled composition.

Order and simplicity in pictures which are very rich in analytical elements arise from the arrangement of details, enlarge the scale of a drawn or modelled composition. That is why the rhythm or repetition of two or three main directions must be particularly considered. Branches which are so profuse, folds in the ground, offer manifold directions. All you have to do is to pick out those which appear most frequently and ignore the rest. *Nature suggests everything at one and the same time, she always gives therefore what you ask of her. But you must know what to ask . . .*



39. POL DE LIMBOURG. The month of February. *Les Très Riches Heures of the Duc de Berry*. Detail
Musée Condé, Chantilly

In the static and descriptive landscapes of the Illuminators and Primitives, light is retained only in so far as it gives body to the objects, emphasising their specific form. The disturbing elements: chiaroscuro, excessive movement of the figures, movement of the masses and lines of construction, are rejected. Neither wind in the landscape, nor gesticulation in the characters. Each object is carefully particularised with the help of a system of ornaments as differentiated as possible and placed side by side in the manner of hieroglyphs on Egyptian lintels. As in Cranach's *Nymph*, several perspectives are involved, just as it happens where you have the successive vision of objects.

Balance, like weights in the pans of an ideal pair of scales. Purely scriptural dialectics, æsthetics based on identity. Technique of the plastic symbol and local tone.



40. GIOVANNI BELLINI. The Madonna of the Meadow. Detail
National Gallery, London

This localisation of ornaments taken to their greatest degree of specificity, the chief preoccupation of the Gothic artists, persists in all the great painters throughout all their experiments on luminous atmosphere. This fragment of Bellini reveals the same researches along with a more accentuated feeling of atmosphere.



41. SCHOOL OF BREUGHEL THE ELDER. View of Naples Harbour. *Palazzo Doria, Rome*
Imagine this sky in a bad picture. It would be empty or the clouds would have no relationship of tint and design with the rest of the picture. Here we have the lapping of the foreground waves echoed in the top part of the canvas. The whole picture has its place under the sign of agitation.

42. UNKNOWN NINETEENTH-CENTURY PRIMITIVE. View of Toulon Harbour
A modern Primitive, moved by one consideration only, the portrayal of a spectacle that appeals to him, recaptures spontaneously the great traditional composition based on the welding together of different view-points. A beginner gives a lesson to many professional daubers of sketches.



43. HOBBEEMA. Road through a Village. *Kaiser Friedrich Museum, Berlin*
Breughel fills his sky with the agitation of waves or ships' sails, Hobbema projects the outline of his trees against it.

44. CÉZANNE. Road through a Village
The characteristic of contemporary painting is the integral use of the surface, free from inexpressive voids. The Dutch realists furnished the void of the sky with sublime clouds in accordance with the æsthetic principles of the easel-picture. The mural, subjected to more strictly plastic exigencies, has its skies invaded by solid elements. The distant details of the scene applied to the surface are piled up vertically instead of being extended in an imitated depth. The third dimension is no longer imitated but suggested by the very construction of the picture and the colour.



45. CÉZANNE. Forest landscape. *Kunsthau, Zürich*

46. OTHON FRIESZ. Landscape

Whereas the compositions of some painters of the 16th and 17th centuries were closed like two stage wings by the simple play of architecture or rocks supported by the sides of the picture, Cézanne and his disciples closed theirs by the very movement of the objects, curved inwards so as to insert the interior masses plastically. The picture is centred; the elements gravitate round an invisible core.

You will note in the Cézanne the utilisation of the branches, those minute elements, as supports of atmospheric modelling, veritable aerial *planes* intended to suggest depth.



47. CLAUDE LORRAIN. Architecture. *Uffizi, Florence*

48. CLAUDE LORRAIN. Harbour entrance, evening. *Ecole des Beaux Arts, Paris*

At the *Musée de l'Homme*, American section, there are two 'tapas' emanating from the same hand the ornamentation of which is radically dissimilar. One is decorated with motives assembled at right angles, the other with interlacings untempered by any straight line. If each of us were ingenuously sincere, he could express himself continually with such diversity. These two wash drawings by Claude obeying, one the straight line dominance, the other the curved, correspond to two opposing states of mind and adapt themselves to two different situations. Nowadays a definitive choice is foolishly demanded between these two tendencies in the name of the respect owed by the artist to the limited viewpoint of the collector.



49. ALTENDORFER. Satyr and Nymph
Kaiser Friedrich Museum, Berlin

There is something of a Van Gogh agitation in this foliage turning in all directions, as also in the convolutions of drapery and the blades of grass which curl upwards. The calm of the figure (on which a head smaller than natural size confers monumentality) harmonises with the brightness of a sky which, reduced to a convenient scale and broken up as much as the artist wanted, does not require clouds to achieve monumentality.



50. ANDRÉ DERRAIN. Le Sausset (1913)

The modern amplifies these movements balanced in an almost casual way, participating in the scene in a physical sense, allowing himself to be carried away as by the swell of the sea. (See p. 42.)



51. VAN GOYEN. Landscape

Petit Palais, Paris

The strong contrasts of light and shade, the repeated modelling, supplement the expression through colour. *The chiaroscuro is independent of the colour.* But just listen a moment:

Corot: 'What is to be seen in painting or rather what I look for, is the form, the whole, the value of the tones. Colour for me comes afterwards, it is like a person whom you welcome . . . If he or she has a good character, it will be an additional attraction which will be an advantage, but it is not the main consideration. That is why for me colour comes later; for first and foremost I appreciate the whole, the tone harmonies; whereas colour sometimes gives you a shock which I do not care for.' *Story of Corot*, by Moreau-Nélaton.

Théodore Couture: 'Rembrandt is a colourist in the beauty of his values as Rubens is by the opulence of his colours'. *Method and Studio-talks*.

Eugène Fromentin: 'The element of "values" dominates more and more in proportion as the colour-principle diminishes. If it happens, as in the half-tones in which all colour becomes pale, as in pictures of exaggerated chiaroscuro where all colour-emphasis fades out, as in Rembrandt for instance; where in some pictures everything is monochromatic, if it happens, I say, that the colour element almost entirely disappears, a neutral, subtle, yet real principle remains on the palette, the (what might be called abstract) value of the things which are hidden, and it is with this negative, colourless principle of infinite subtlety that the rarest pictures are sometimes made.' *The Old Masters*.

Charles Dufresnoy: 'When we say of a painter that he has a proper understanding of chiaroscuro, we do not mean that he colours effectively the parts of the picture deprived of light; we merely mean that he distributes the masses of light and shade in a telling manner. Chiaroscuro, which has no plural number, is then the art of effectively arranging the darks and lights in a picture.' (1611 - 1665. *The Art of Painting*.)

[These quotations are taken from Henri Guerlin's book, *L'Art enseigné par les Maîtres* (H. Laurens).]



52. VAN GOGH. River's Edge

Collection of Mme F. Oppenheim, Berlin

Refer back to the chapter on Colour, p. 7.



53. GÉRARD DAVID. Nativity. Detail

Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest

The relative emptiness in the bottom of the sky is explained here because it is in a subtle relationship with the distant buildings, and because it corresponds to the clear and tranquil parts in the rest of the composition.



54. EL GRECO. View of Toledo

Metropolitan Museum, New York

Gérard David's landscape is only a detail of a full-scale composition. This one constitutes a closed whole. The same rhythm sweeps over the trees, earth and sky, the same contrast-values cover the whole surface. The adjustment of the scene on the depth of the canvas is carried out in a masterly way. As in Breughel's seascape or the tumultuous landscape of Rubens, the outlines of the agitated trees are repeated in the sky. Anyone who has been to Toledo will have seen that the ground is gently undulating and not rugged as in this. 'Nature' has been subjected then to an invented rhythm; perhaps the painter's mood was responsible for it, or possibly the actual storm, reverberating in all directions, gave him the idea.



55. HIERONYMUS BOSCH. Paradise. Detail
Escorial. Capitulary Room

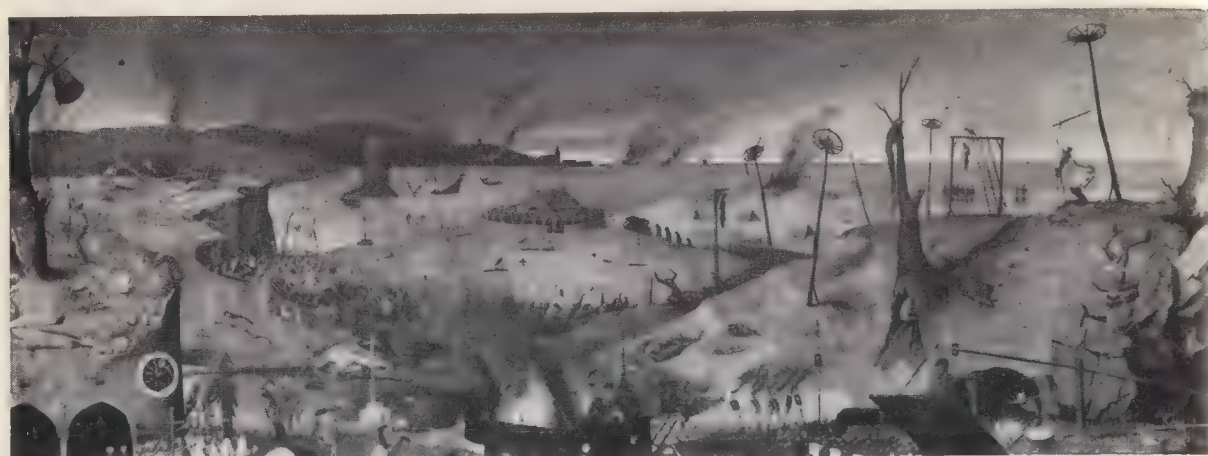
Is there any need to draw attention to the fact that this picture is pure decoration, loosened by a very delicate pictorial subject matter? The more the decoration, the less the modelling: the fragment of hell contains, in contrast, much fewer objects. For a light and a shadow are, in pictorial language, plastic objects.



56. HIERONYMUS BOSCH. Hell. Detail
Escorial. Capitulary Room

El Greco's landscape introduces us to the world of the fantastic in a very natural way. You can invent from nature or in the calm of the studio; it suffices in the latter case to have a good memory.

The French have taken quite a long time to discover Hieronymus Bosch and Breughel. The surrealist current has probably not been unconnected with this happy event (*Paradise* and *Hell* are the two finest surrealist pictures). But there remain many discoveries to be made among the Old Masters, above all among Flemish painters. It has not always been the most heroic or the most profound or the strangest who have the honour of monographs in our lazy century.



57. BREUGHEL THE ELDER. The Triumph of Death. Detail
Prado, Madrid

The charnel-house heaps of Ravensbruck, Belsen and Dora would certainly merit to be thus perpetuated. But this very picture proves the inanity of protests in the form of pictures (and even in writing). Does thought carry any weight in the world of affairs? It is perhaps this feeling of moral impotence which has gradually led the modern painter towards expression by technique and not by subject. Tragedy lies within; it comes through the pure drama of plastic and colour. Let the devotees of edifying illustrations resign themselves to it, and all those who persist in dreaming of a useful and social art.



58. SALVADOR DALÍ. Composition

To direct visionaries, open-air imaginative painters, hopeful ecstasies who, heirs of Cézanne, see reality transformed under the influence of their sensation, can be opposed tragic visionaries, studio imaginatives. They nearly always play the additional role of moralisers. Their successors are the surrealists whose attitude is by no means new. They have one fault, denying all merit to painters of sensation and awaiting their marching orders from poets who have made it their business to 'challenge painting'.



59. REMBRANDT. Landscape with a Coach

Wallace Collection, London

The term visionary is applied by the public to painters who present scenes in an unaccustomed light. Less touchy on the question of resemblance to life, this public might bring its curiosity to bear on the mysteries of technique. For it is in the last resort to a question of technique that the genesis of a picture – and its expression – is reduced.

El Greco, Rembrandt, combine their antitheses, organise in detail their plastic snares and carefully prepare their 'underpaintings'. These things are incompatible with inspiration in the popular sense of fulgurant revelation, literary or sentimental spirit. Real inspiration has a basis of forms and colours presenting themselves in an unexpected order. After what I have said about Cuyp, I hope I do not need to comment on this picture from the point of view of chiaroscuro.



60. VICTOR HUGO. The Old Bridge

Taken from *Victor Hugo, the artist*, by Raymond Escholier (published Crès)

To make of this fine wash drawing, possibly 'inspired' (though nothing can be less certain), a picture worthy of this name, it would require days of work and reflection during which the 'inspiration' has time to vanish . . . The poet would have needed the technique of Rembrandt to realise so sublime a project. He would then have been a 'Sunday poet'.



61. ANDRÉ LHOTE. Mirmande

62. LEONARDO DA VINCI. Steep landscape lapped by lake waters

Uffizi, Florence

Da Vinci did not separate the idea of painting from that of sensory or intellectual expression. His *Treatises* mix technical aphorisms with the most minute natural observations and the most fantastic descriptions. He considered as incomplete those painters who, like Botticelli, did not know (in his eyes) how to paint landscape (seeming to him to have produced it with the help of a sponge filled with colour). He advised his pupils to give themselves up to long literary descriptions of natural scenes as much as to patient studies, proceeding from the tree to the blade of grass and from the mountain to the pebble. 'Describe the landscape with wind and water, with the sunrise and sunset. Describe a wind and a gale, a downpour of rain.'

His *Treatises* remain elements of cerebral excitement; for the modern, they are text-books of enthusiasm rather than technical treatises. We no longer see with the same eyes; only a blind man like Peladan

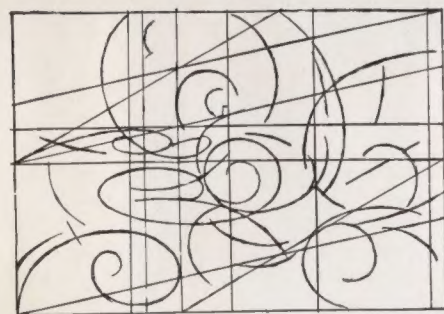


(who admits in his commentaries never to have succeeded in seeing violet shadows) could recognise himself in it.

We appreciate only his *mental constructions* such as the one reproduced here, and we remain cold when this great mind says to us: 'Take a piece of glass, demi-royal size, and place it perpendicularly between your eyes and the object you wish to draw, then move back two-thirds of an arm's length and keep your head motionless by means of an apparatus so that you cannot move it. Then close one eye and mark with a brush on the glass whatever is reflected in it and then transfer on to paper the drawing made on the glass; next, transfer this drawing on to another sheet of paper to get a clearer one. This you can paint, being careful to observe aerial perspective.'

Such a drawing can be executed in our time, but only to bring out, by contrast, with a drawing of spontaneous impression, the considerable gulf which separates normal vision from sensory vision (that is to say *inspired* in Cézanne's use of the word).

The prestige of technique is so great, however, that it is possible for a photographic tracing of the above kind to become a sublime work, thanks to interior modelling such as Da Vinci invented. By their very exaggeration they transform this exact contour into an unreal contour. So true is it that drawing is the most impalpable thing imaginable, submitted as it is to the influences of the colour it contains or the modelling.



63. RUBENS. Philemon and Baucis overtaken by a storm. *Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna*

Rubens' correspondence shows him infatuated with perpetual motion; it is not unreasonable then to see the reflection of his strange preoccupations in the majority of his dynamic compositions. Canvases like the *Battle of the Amazons*, or like the present landscape constructed on the same principle, may be considered as idealised perpetual-motion machines. They search space in all directions. It is fascinating to find the great Van Gogh spiral in Rubens' sky. But instead of developing only on the surface as in the case of the Fleming, it stretches back into depth as well. Thus the classical architect applies the façade on to the depth. The mind unconsciously affected by this plastic dialectic, regular 'topology', becomes aware of depth not by the stupid methods of imitation but by the sublime ones of intellectual interpretation. If ever landscape deserved the appellation of microcosm it is this one, it seems to me, more than any other.



64. VAN GOGH. Starry Night

The mysterious 'voice' of the Romantics was perhaps heard in modern times by Van Gogh alone. His is as strange, as individual a case, as that of Douanier Rousseau in another domain. Wonderful are his canvases executed under the influence of a transcendental ecstasy. Landscape so revealing of another world can only have been done straight off the reel, although his malady had allowed him to plunge back into the same trances again, like a medium. If, as I wrote long ago, the Impressionist movement forms the first illustration of the 'dematerialisation of matter', to use Gustave le Bon's expression, we must acknowledge in Van Gogh the painter who had the strangest intuition of the new truth that has become commonplace since the advent of the atom bomb.

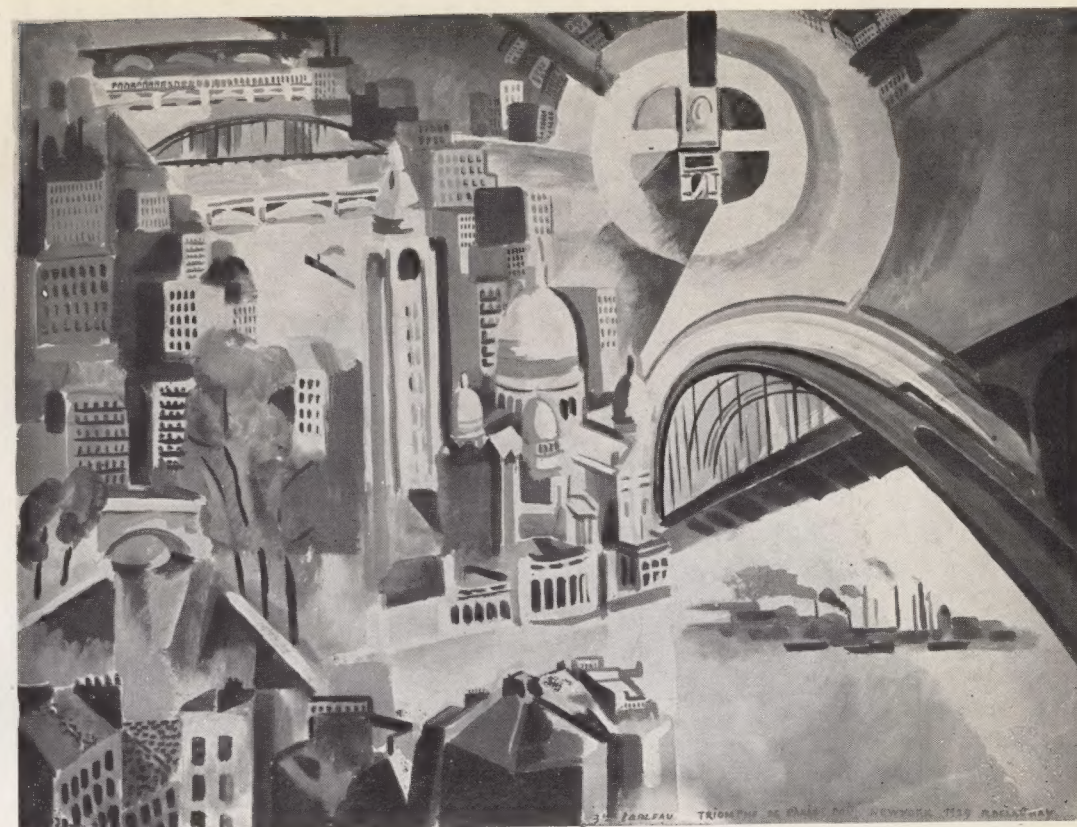
Any combination of curves implies an allusion to the great cosmic rhythms. Harmoniously attuned to these rhythms like primitive man, Van Gogh unconsciously restores elemental whirlwinds that are pregnant with deep sensation.



65. PIERO DI COSIMO. The Story of Theseus and Ariadne. Detail
Palais de Longchamp, Marseilles

The maze has a very exact esoteric significance. In the eyes of the Gothic, it leads by a difficult road to death in the sight of a triumphal resurrection. The Milanese whose soul is capable of deciphering the enigma of the half-effaced labyrinth held out before him by the guardian of the Kingdom of the Shades, is admitted to the happy abode of the dead.

If the orbs and interlacings evoke the rhythms on which the universe is founded, the curves traced by the brush of Van Gogh appear akin to those drawn on paddles, shields, or ritual masks, by the primitive, that delegate of creation, that messenger of natural forces. Rubens' spirals have an identical significance, as also, more or less unconsciously, do the majority of so-called 'Baroque' pictures.



66. DELAUNAY. The Triumph of Paris (1929)

The unity of time and place was unknown to the greatest painters, the Gothic artists. The latter represented simultaneously events which took place in time. We can imagine recapitulative landscapes, based not on the traditional compenetration of elements borrowed from various view-points, and assembled together in a coherent whole, but, on the contrary, juxtaposed in accordance with the necessities of an exclusively plastic logic. It is not unreasonable to see a resemblance between the ideal journey covered by our mind to wed these different view-points on Paris, and the arabesque in depth, the spiral drawn in space by the baroque plant . . . There are many doors open to the activity of the painter of composed landscapes. Anything is permissible; it is enough to have temperament and a proper knowledge of 'plastic constants'.


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